



ULRICH KNAPPE

Theory and Practice
in Kant and Kierkegaard

*Kierkegaard Studies
Monograph Series*



DE  GRUYTER

Kierkegaard Studies
Monograph Series

9

Kierkegaard Studies

Edited on behalf of the
Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre
by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser

Monograph Series 9

Edited by
Niels Jørgen Cappelørn

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York

Ulrich Knappe

Theory and Practice
in Kant and Kierkegaard

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York

Kierkegaard Studies
Edited on behalf of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre
by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser

Monograph Series
Volume 9

Edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn

The Foundation for the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre
at Copenhagen University
is funded by The Danish National Research Foundation.

⊗ Printed on acid-free paper which falls within the guidelines of the ANSI
to ensure permanence and durability.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Knappe, Ulrich.

Theory and practice in Kant and Kierkegaard / Ulrich Knappe.

p. cm. — (Kierkegaard studies. Monograph series ; 9)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 3-11-017789-7 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Kant, Immanuel, 1724–1804. 2. Kierkegaard, Søren, 1813–1855. I. Title. II. Series.

B2798.K537 2004

198'.9—dc22

2004004286

Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the Internet at <<http://dnb.ddb.de>>.

ISBN 3-11-017789-7

ISSN 1434-2952

© Copyright 2004 by Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, D-10785 Berlin
All rights reserved, including those of translation into foreign languages. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed in Germany

Disk conversion: OLD-Satz digital, Neckarsteinach

Cover design: Christopher Schneider, Berlin

Table of Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	1

Chapter 1

1	In Search of a Theory of Knowledge	17
1.1	Immediate and Mediate Representation	18
1.2	Truth as Correspondence Between Thinking and Objects	25
1.3	Empirical Consciousness and its Rootedness in Time	28
1.4	The Impossibility of an Intellectual Intuition	32

Chapter 2

2	Kierkegaard's Explicit and Implicit Critiques of Kant's Theory of Knowledge.	37
2.1	Kierkegaard's Explicit Critique of the Relation Between Actuality and Thinking	39
2.1.1	The Relation Between Actuality and Thinking in Terms of Intellectual Intuition	39
2.1.2	The Relation Between Actuality and Thinking in Terms of the Invention of Objects	40
2.1.3	The Relation Between Actuality and Thinking in Terms of <i>Things in Themselves</i> as the Cause of Sense-Affection . . .	41
2.2	Kierkegaard's Implicit Critique: The Difference Between Kant's and Kierkegaard's Epistemologies.	43
2.3	Hegel's Straightforward Deviation from Kierkegaard . . .	49

Chapter 3

3	Double-Mindedness or the Failure of an Orientation of the Will.	52
3.1	Standing at the Crossroads and the Incorporation of <i>a posteriori</i> Incentives	54

3.2	Hypothetical Imperatives and Double-Mindedness	56
3.3	Prudence	60
3.4	Time as the Condition of the Possibility of Prudence	65

Chapter 4

4	The Ethical Stage	70
4.1	The Principle of the Good Will as the Categorical Imperative.	71
4.2	Kierkegaard's Kantian Conception of Ethics.	77
4.3	The Problem of Justification and Choice in the Ethical . .	86
	Appendix. The Failure of the Ethical: Radical Evil and Original Sin.	97

Chapter 5

5	The Religious Conception in <i>Purity of Heart</i> and <i>Postscript</i>	101
5.1	The Good Will as Unconditionally Good	103
5.2	The Finiteness of the Good Will's Unconditionality and Its Domain	105
5.3	Implications of the Good Will as the Sole Unconditional Good	111
5.3.1	The Necessity of Acting from Duty.	111
5.3.2	The Necessity of Being Determined by a Universal Principle	114
5.4	Kierkegaard's Departure from the Categorical Imperative.	118

Chapter 6

6.	The Christian Stage of Existence and Its Departure from Kant	127
6.1.	The Possibility of Subjective Reflection	129
6.2.	The Impossibility of Objective Reflection	135

	<i>Conclusion</i>	145
	<i>Bibliography</i>	149
	<i>Index</i>	155

Preface

The work described in this book was carried out partly at King's College, University of Cambridge as a Ph.D. dissertation and partly at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre at the University of Copenhagen. I would like to thank my supervisors in Cambridge, Dr. Raymond Geuss and Dr. George Pattison as well as my supervisor in Copenhagen, Dr. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn.

I would especially like to thank Raymond Geuss for his encouragement and for our many discussions, for helping me to better understand Kant and Kierkegaard and for his support during the last years. Without his help, this book would not have been possible.

I would like to thank George Pattison for introducing me to Kierkegaard, for his assistance with my English prose as well as for encouraging me to study at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre. I am deeply indebted to Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and grateful for the kindness he has repeatedly shown me. His immense knowledge of Kierkegaard's writings has been an important resource and I have also learned a great deal from our discussions.

Professor Poul Lübcke from the University of Copenhagen has been an invaluable source of inspiration. I have benefitted immensely from his seminars and from countless private discussions.

I am also indebted to numerous other people. I am indebted to my former professor from Berlin, Professor Rolf-Peter Horstmann, whose respective lectures and seminars on Kant laid the foundation for this book. I am grateful for the discussions with two friends and colleagues at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, Brian Söderquist and Paul Muench, who generously offered their personal support in addition to help with linguistic corrections. Also a special thanks to Brian, Paul, Christine Thaning and Christian Tolstrup for their immense help with editing! I would also like to thank my friend Dr. Niels Nymann Eriksen for his advice and kindness and to thank Professor Anders Moe Rasmussen for the helpful and supportive Monday afternoon conversations. Furthermore, I want to acknowledge the support of my examiner at Cambridge, Professor Alastair Hannay, as well as Professor Paul

Cruysberghs, Professor Karl Verstrynge, Kirsten Klercke, Cynthia Lund, Professor Gordon Marino, Professor Rüdiger Bittner, Professor Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, Professor Michael Theunissen, Professor Herman Deuser, Dr. Sigrun Anselm, and many others in Cambridge, Copenhagen and Berlin whose assistance contributed to this study.

And finally, I want to express my gratitude to my parents, Ralf and Ursula Knappe, as well as to my brother, Stefan, and my uncle, Dr. Peter Romeis who gave me every support possible.

Special thanks to the students I supervised at the University of Cambridge as well as the students who attended my seminars at the University of Copenhagen and the University of Aarhus, especially Jacob Lautrup Kristensen and Carsten Fogh Nielsen. It has been (and is) a great pleasure and help – at least for myself.

I would like to acknowledge my gratitude for the funding I received in the form of scholarships and awards from the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, King's College, the Cambridge European Trust, the Burney Fund and from the Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College.

U. Knappe
Copenhagen, March 2004

Abbreviations

All passages that I quote from Kierkegaard's writings are taken from the English translation published by Princeton University Press under the general editorship of Howard Hong. This edition includes marginal references to the volume and page of the first Danish edition of Kierkegaard's complete works, *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, and in the case of *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* to the fourth volume of *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*. The page references I give are to these editions and, wherever possible, to the new scholarly Danish edition, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (see the Bibliography for complete references).

A/B	<i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> [Critique]
CJ	<i>Critique of Judgment</i>
CPR	<i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>
G	<i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> [Groundwork]
MM	<i>Metaphysics of Morals</i>
R	<i>Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason</i> [Religion]
I, II	<i>Either/Or</i>
III	<i>Fear and Trembling</i>
IV	<i>Concept of Anxiety</i>
IV B1	<i>De Omnibus Dubitandum Est</i> [De Omnibus]
VI	<i>Stages on Life's Way</i>
VII	<i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i> [Postscript]
VIII	<i>An Occasional Discourse</i> [Purity of Heart]
XI	<i>Sickness Unto Death</i>
XII	<i>Practice in Christianity</i>
XIII	<i>Concept of Irony</i>
XIII	<i>Point of View for My Work as an Author</i>

Introduction

This book explores what we are capable of knowing and what we ought to do; it investigates the most fundamental theoretical and practical principles that apply to a human being. Insofar as we base our ways of thinking and acting upon principles, they become ‘structured’, that is, they escape chaos. What we then know or do is not arbitrary, but follows a rule and hence gives us our theoretical and practical situatedness or orientation. But what kinds of principles are capable of being justified, i. e., what principles are capable of giving human beings reliable orientation?

As indicated, this work can be understood as a search for a basis by which we may govern our lives. It investigates the most fundamental theoretical and practical principles that would underlie such a basis. In doing so, I continually refer to some of the principal aspects in the thought of Immanuel Kant and Søren Kierkegaard. I develop and investigate the problem as it arises in their thinking. Nevertheless I do not ‘simply’ give an account of what they believe. Instead, I try to think *with* Kant and Kierkegaard, that is, I try to illuminate how the distinctions they draw are systematically related to each other and discuss to what extent their views are plausible.

It may initially seem, however, that the conceptions present in the thinking of Kant and Kierkegaard are incompatible with each other. On the one hand, Kant was *the* paradigmatic philosopher of the European Enlightenment who fused elements of earlier rationalism and empiricism into fundamental principles of science and ethics. On the other hand, Kierkegaard was sceptical about the achievements of the enlightenment. He considered both rationalism and empiricism, as well as the fundamental principles of science and ethics after which they strived, to lead to inauthentic modes of existence. And ultimately, he held that human autonomy and reason are by no means of unlimited worth. It could seem, then, that one must be either a Kantian or a Kierkegaardian, that one either has to rely on the approach taken by Kant *or* by Kierkegaard. It seems impossible to find agreement between two such world-views.

The problem of situatedness or orientation as defined above is crucial to Kant's thinking. This applies to his *theory of knowledge* as well as to his *moral philosophy*. In both realms there are certain principles which constitute an orientation. Insofar as a human being's attitudes are in agreement with these principles, she can be referred to as being situated or oriented. Insofar as theoretical knowledge is concerned, only a self which meets the conditions of the categories and of the so-called transcendental consciousness is capable of structuring or unifying empirical objects in such a way that a coherent and objective experience becomes possible. Similarly, only insofar as we live in accordance with the law of the categorical imperative are we capable of structuring our conduct and the corresponding attitudes in a justified way.

For Kierkegaard, too, orientation is *the* fundamental problem. He deals with this issue throughout his authorship. Although Kierkegaard may be reluctant to use the Kantian language of rules and principles, it is clear that a human being has to rely on certain ideals or certain principles if an orientation is to be possible at all. Only if organisation meets certain stable conditions and criteria, will it be possible to provide an account of a theory of the self as Kierkegaard does. And only then will he be able to address this topic seriously and describe it in a controlled manner. As we will see, Kierkegaard shares some fundamental convictions with Kant concerning how the orientation must be understood.

This does not at all mean, however, that Kierkegaard's thinking is Kantian through and through. Indeed, as we will see, he *departs* from Kantian epistemology and Kantian ethics in important respects. In other words, he finally disapproves of the kind of orientation and the corresponding principles for which Kant argues. But, as we will see, the abandonment of the respective principles does not lead to mere arbitrariness; it leads to different kinds of principles despite the fact that they involve a devaluation of rational standards. However, it is my conviction that one can only make sense of the differences between Kant and Kierkegaard against the background of their area of agreement. To focus on differences without recognising where and in what respect Kant and Kierkegaard agree does justice neither to their areas of agreement nor, finally, to the differences themselves.

As I see it, research on the relationship between Kant and Kierkegaard has not fully done justice to the complexity of the issues. Kierkegaard scholars are reluctant to engage in Kantian thinking, assuming perhaps that the two thinkers have little in common. A prominent example of this tendency in research is the work of Michael

Theunissen. Although he is one of the few systematic thinkers in Kierkegaard studies, Theunissen hardly addresses the possible affinities that Kierkegaard may have with Kant. Other interpreters like Jamie Ferreira, Niels Thulstrup, Gregor Malantschuk, Herman Diem, Johannes Sløk, George Connell, David Gouwens and many others refer to Kant in a fairly casual way. Usually it is Hegel and not Kant who is mentioned by these writers. If they mention Kant at all, it is generally only to indicate that Kierkegaard *rejected* Kantian ethics.

Anthony Rudd's book *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*¹ delivers a more extensive discussion of the relation between Kant and Kierkegaard. Kantian ethics is said to have 'a pivotal significance'² for Kierkegaard, but nevertheless, Rudd doubts that Kierkegaard's thinking has anything in common with Kant. He considers such a claim to be 'as radical an error as it is possible to make in the interpretation of Kierkegaard'³ and flatly rejects the claim that 'Kierkegaard's moral philosophy is at all Kantian'.⁴

A more balanced view on the relation between Kant and Kierkegaard appears in articles by Paul Cruysberghs, Emil Brunner, Alfred Bäuml, R. Z. Friedman, Paul Ricoeur and Helmut Fahrenbach as well as in some of the articles which appear in the recently published book *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion*, edited by D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin.⁵ Although these essays provide the reader with useful, interesting and often correct comments in respect of Kierkegaard's Kantian inheritance, there still remains a need for a more thorough and more systematic analysis. Monographs by C. Stephen Evans, Jeremy D. B. Walker, and Alastair Hannay do provide a more detailed and more thoroughgoing picture of the extent to which Kierkegaard's thought is Kantian. Alastair Hannay in particular deals with this relation in a deeper way. He discovers a number of analogies and often succeeds in demonstrating in what ways Kierkegaard departs from Kant. Nevertheless his outstanding book is also limited in several respects: (1) he does not exclusively *focus* on the relation between Kant and

¹ Anthony Rudd *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993.

² Op. cit., p. 12.

³ Op. cit., p. 71.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 135.

⁵ *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion*, ed. by D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin, London: MacMillan Press 2000. For a full bibliography on the relationship between Kant and Kierkegaard see Ronald M. Green's extensive documentation in his *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1992.

Kierkegaard (nor, of course, is it his aim to do so); (2) he mainly limits his discussion of the Kantian inheritance to two Kierkegaardian works, that is, to *Purity of Heart* and *Works of Love*; and (3) he does not relate Kierkegaard's so-called stages of existence to Kant.

Ten years ago Ronald M. Green took a step forward when he published the book *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, which is exclusively devoted to a comparison of Kant and Kierkegaard. Green suggests that Kierkegaard was familiar with a number of Kantian works and touches upon interesting analogies between the two thinkers. In his first chapter, 'Lines of Influence', Green divides the Kantian works into three categories, those with which Kierkegaard had 'certain familiarity'⁶, those which he 'very likely read'⁷ and those 'for which evidence is missing'.⁸ The criterion for the first category is whether Kierkegaard quotes from the respective work of Kant. The criterion for the second is whether he owned the book. Furthermore Green tries to support his view that Kierkegaard was acquainted with Kant's works by comparing various passages of Kant and Kierkegaard and by trying to bring out certain analogies in their thinking. In the second chapter of his book, Green gives an overview of Kant's philosophy under the headings 'epistemology'⁹, 'ethics'¹⁰, and 'philosophy of religion'¹¹, and refers in each of these sections to several of Kant's works. Green's third chapter then returns to these topics and attempts to establish 'points of contact'¹² in order to prepare for the analysis of his fourth chapter, which deals with 'deep engagements'¹³ between the two thinkers.¹⁴

Green finds the (then) existing secondary literature on the relation between Kant and Kierkegaard to be inadequate, and claims in his introduction that the four main chapters of his book seek to remedy some of what he finds to be lacking. He says, 'All confine themselves

⁶ Ronald M. Green *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, p. 10.

⁷ Op. cit., p. 13.

⁸ Op. cit., p. 28.

⁹ Op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁰ Op. cit., p. 42.

¹¹ Op. cit., p. 49.

¹² Op. cit., p. 75.

¹³ Op. cit., p. 121.

¹⁴ With respect to epistemology, Green discusses Kant's critique of theistic proofs and the relation between faith and reason. With respect to ethics, he focuses on Kant's conception of ethical ideality, and his anti-eudaemonism and moral pessimism. Finally, with respect to religion, he discusses the problem of radical evil and repentance.

to identifying one or another broad conceptual parallel, none seeks to trace the exact extent of Kierkegaard's debt to Kant and none tries to determine whether Kierkegaard actually studied Kant closely'.¹⁵ This makes clear that one of Green's main concerns is the historical question concerning the extent to which Kierkegaard *actually* read Kant.

One consequence of Green's focus on these historical matters of fact is that his conceptual analysis does not stand, so to speak, on its own feet. In fact, Green does not really appear to have a very clearly articulated methodology. His analysis usually consists of rather loose comparisons between quotes of Kant and Kierkegaard. Although Green touches upon a number of interesting issues that had not previously been considered in the field, his interpretations often lack the conceptual rigour of analytical research. This deficiency is connected with the fact that Green does not develop his analysis in a *systematic* way. Although his interpretations are generally connected to one of the above-mentioned topics, neither the topics themselves nor the interpretations they entail are part of a systematic *structure*. We are not told the exact *status* of, for example, epistemology or the characteristics of Kierkegaard's various stages and the criteria by which we can identify them. Thus, while Green's book was a welcome addition to Kierkegaard studies (especially for the role it played in drawing attention to the very idea of comparing Kant and Kierkegaard), we still lack for the most part a systematic approach in a comparative study of Kant and Kierkegaard – not to mention in a study of Kierkegaard's thinking more generally.

In this study I take up this challenge and develop a systematic reconstruction of Kant's and, to a greater degree, Kierkegaard's thinking. I try to disambiguate concepts which may in fact be or may seem to be ambiguous. I also try to separate premises and arguments in order to identify the relevant consequences such that they agree with the text as best as possible.¹⁶ Contrary, then, to Green's approach, my analysis is first of all conceptual. By this I mean that I abstract important concepts from Kierkegaard's texts and analyse them for the most part in isolation from any historical or contextual concerns. I attempt to reconstruct the definition of concepts which are themselves embedded in an often confusing literary context. The few times I refer to

¹⁵ Op. cit., p. xiv.

¹⁶ Dieter Henrich calls such a methodology 'argumentierende Rekonstruktion'. See Henrich *Identität und Objektivität*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitäts-Verlag 1976, p. 9.

‘historical’ issues, I do so only in order better to understand and illuminate what Kant and Kierkegaard mean. The historical is not for this study a concern in and of itself. One consequence of this methodology is that I very rarely refer to the main representatives of German idealism, namely Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.¹⁷ This does not, of course, mean that Kierkegaard has not been influenced by these thinkers or that it is not important to investigate these and other influences.

However, the main focus of my book is Kierkegaard’s relation to Kant. I want to show to what extent Kierkegaard’s thinking is *internally connected* to Kant’s thinking. By this I mean that I want to bring into view the extent to which the framework and meaning of one body of thought is in agreement with the framework and meaning of the other. It follows from this that the thinking of Kierkegaard and Kant could be seen to be internally connected without, however, Kierkegaard *ever* having read or heard of Kant.¹⁸ Hence the analysis and the corresponding establishment of such internal connections is valid *independent* of any historical influences. Such an analysis stands on its own feet and, in this respect, the approach of this investigation differs and indeed intends to differ from the way in which most present day literature on Kierkegaard is written. Of course, the *style* of writing of Kierkegaard and Kant is very different. This makes it impossible always to find a way of expressing things which does justice to both thinkers and thus my discussion remains to a certain extent alien to each of them. But this does not mean that I depart from the corresponding meanings and implications of what they thought. To the contrary, as I see it, a conceptual analysis brings us closer to an understanding of each thinker.

To reconstruct Kierkegaard’s thinking systematically, however, is an endeavour that many Kierkegaard scholars consider to be impossi-

¹⁷ Furthermore, the complexity, difficulty and depth of Kant’s and Kierkegaard’s works do not allow me to engage here with Kant’s aesthetic theory and his anthropology, although such an investigation could prove to be quite fruitful. In my view it is *more* important to be precise and – hopefully – thoroughgoing in some respects than to try to refer and allude to every possible point of contact.

¹⁸ Or, alternatively, Kierkegaard might have read Kant extensively (*pace* Green’s project) without there being a single Kantian feature reflected in his thought. However, with this in mind, it is worth noting that it is, of course, not true that Kierkegaard had no familiarity with Kant’s writings. There is sufficient evidence that Kierkegaard read several of Kant’s works, just as there is sufficient evidence that he was quite aware of the Kantian basis of German Idealism. Also, many of his explicit references to Kant reveal an astonishing understanding of crucial aspects of Kant’s thinking, which, to date, has hardly been investigated.

ble. It is often argued that his books do not entail thinking of this sort. In respect of this objection some interpreters are convinced that they have Kierkegaard on their side. Does the Dane not *himself* repeatedly inveigh against systematic thinking? Indeed this is the case, but it is the peculiar kind of systematic thinking belonging to German idealism that he has in mind and critiques; he does not, however, deny that there is *any* systematic order to be discovered whatsoever. I agree with Michael Theunissen when he says: 'if system can be understood as a developing and uniform theory that is oriented towards completeness, then one ... must assert that the anti-systematic thinker Kierkegaard ... becomes himself the constructor of a system'.¹⁹

This is not to say that Kierkegaard never addresses aspects of our lives that can seem to resist being captured by systematic thought. For example, as we will see in this book, the movement from the ethical to the Christian stage of existence corresponds to an increasing devaluation of rational standards implicit in our thinking or a devaluation of the possibility of what Kierkegaard calls 'objective reflection'. In other words, insofar as we seek to reflect theoretically upon these stages of existence, it becomes more and more impossible to do so. Nevertheless we can say that the devaluation of these rational standards corresponds to the systematic position of the various stages with respect to thinking. For example, it is the God-man as the object of faith which prevents us from thinking the foundation of Christian existence in a way that is logically coherent. However, even though the object of faith itself resists conceptualisation, Kierkegaard nevertheless gives it a systematic place – albeit negatively – by making us understand the fact that we cannot understand the object of faith and why. Our thinking cannot provide criteria based on formal logic in order to understand the object of faith, but this just is its systematic point.

According to other Kierkegaard interpreters, we cannot trace the claims that are made by Kierkegaard *himself* since it is often not him but a *pseudonym* who makes or seems to make various claims. To what extent can we identify Kierkegaard's position with a position that is presented by a pseudonym? This, of course, is a question that has occupied interpreters of Kierkegaard from the beginning. Again, this is an issue which is highly complex. It is my conviction that this question is often at least partly motivated by a tendency not to pay

¹⁹ Michael Theunissen 'Kierkegaard's Werk und Wirkung' in *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, ed. by Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1979, p. 24 (translation mine).

enough attention to *what* is thought rather than to *who* as a matter of fact can be identified with the thinking.²⁰ Since what is thought is penned by Søren Kierkegaard – whether this reflects his own ‘actual’ and final views on the issues or not – I will not use the name of the pseudonymous authors, but the name Søren Kierkegaard. The fact that I use Kierkegaard’s name, however, rather than a given pseudonym’s is not of much significance. I could just as well have used the name of the pseudonym with respect to my primary aim, which is to deal with the *content* of Kierkegaard’s writings. What Kierkegaard/Anti-Climacus says in *Practice in Christianity* can be said of my book on the whole: ‘I merely follow the thought-categories’ (XII 132).

The book is divided into six chapters and is organised as follows:

1. In Search of a Theory of Knowledge. In the first chapter, drawing primarily on the *Critique of Pure Reason*, *De Omnibus Dubitandum est* and the *Postscript*, I argue that Kant and Kierkegaard share certain presuppositions setting the background of their epistemologies. At the same time, I begin to develop the problem of how our situatedness may be possible – insofar as we are theoretically concerned, that is, insofar as we know what is. Kant assumes that there exist two fundamental bases of our faculty of knowledge: intuition and understanding. In 1.1 I argue that intuitions have an analogy to what Kierkegaard calls immediacy (reality) and that understanding is analogous to what Kierkegaard calls mediacy (ideality). Thereafter I focus on two crucial aspects of the understanding, namely that, according to Kant, the understanding displays itself insofar as we *judge* and it has to be *in accordance with general logic*. I contend that both aspects are rooted in the basic activity of the understanding, namely its ability to unify representations according to rules. Insofar as our understanding unifies, it always does so in the context of a judgement and the necessity that it not logically contradict itself. Such unification and its corresponding orientation is based upon rules of judgements and of general logic. If representations are unified by means of rules of this sort, we can say that what is represented becomes true *potentialiter*. The conditions of the possibility of unification are (negative) conditions of the possibility of truth. Although Kierkegaard obviously does not have an elaborate theory of judgement like Kant, it becomes clear that for him, too, thinking articulates itself in language and must not logically

²⁰ With Michael Theunissen: ‘I strive in a consciously one-sided way after the content.’ See his *Der Begriff Verzweiflung*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1993, p. 8 (translation mine).

contradict itself. However, for both Kant and Kierkegaard, while these two conditions of unification and truth are necessary they remain *insufficient* and hence cannot overcome an essential disorientation or doubt. In 1.2 I discuss presuppositions of Kant's and Kierkegaard's conceptions of theoretical truth, and argue that for both of them it consists in the *correspondence* between thinking and reality or received objects. After raising this issue, I then make more explicit why the two conditions of the understanding are necessary but not sufficient for establishing definite truth or situatedness: they are insufficient because it is impossible by these means for our understanding to distinguish between real objects that are received through our senses and objects that are simply invented by the understanding itself. Accordingly, the rules that arise with our understanding cannot distinguish between non-reality and reality, and hence are not sufficient as an *a priori* condition of truth and orientation. In 1.3 I turn to a discussion of that place where the understanding and intuitions meet, to what Kant calls empirical consciousness. I argue that the necessary condition for the reception of objects in empirical consciousness is *time*. According to both Kant and Kierkegaard objects can only be received in time and only under this condition can we become aware of them. Now, if the rules of the understanding cannot be imposed specifically on reality because they are incapable of giving an *a priori* criterion that is capable of distinguishing between invented and received objects and if the condition of such reception is time, then time (or more correctly: the unsuccessful 'domestication' of time by the understanding) can be understood as a designation of this failure or disorientation of the understanding. Since for both Kant and Kierkegaard time is the condition of the possibility of the *reception* of objects, I stress in 1.4 that it is impossible for human beings to *create* the object. A creation of reality can only be realised by a God or by what Kant calls 'intellectual intuition'. To intuit reality with the intellect means to create it. The understanding creates reality and 'intuits' it in this very act of creation. But we as human beings have to receive objects through time and in this sense we are radically *finite*. We cannot overcome doubt or disorientation by means of an intellectual intuition. We have to rely on the rules of our understanding which, however, will never give the object according to its existence.

2. Kierkegaard's Explicit and Implicit Critiques of Kant's Theory of Knowledge. In the second chapter I investigate the extent to which Kant's and Kierkegaard's respective epistemologies differ from one another, and in the process consider Kant's and Kierkegaard's respec-

tive views about the extent to which our situatedness can be given a theoretical basis. In 2.1 I deal with Kierkegaard's explicit critique of Kant's theory of nature which, however, I will show is unjustified. I mainly refer to a key passage from the *Postscript* where Kierkegaard charges Kant with having related thinking and actuality (conceived of as it is in itself). In 2.1.1–2.1.3 I discuss three different readings of this passage depending on how the relation of thinking to actuality is understood. First of all (2.1.1) it can be understood as a relation in which thinking creates actuality, but since both Kant and Kierkegaard reject the corresponding claim (1.4), Kierkegaard would either severely misunderstand Kant's epistemology or simply does not conceive of the relation in this way. In 2.1.2 I consider the relation understood in terms of an *invention* of objects qua thinking. Here, the understanding does not create the existence of the object, but remains, so to speak, within its own sphere. Kierkegaard agrees with this claim: we can think whatever we want to, if only we do this in the context of language which is in accord with general logic. Again, Kierkegaard would either misunderstand what Kant means or does not refer to such invention. In 2.1.3 I show that Kantian epistemology presupposes as a matter of fact *that* actuality/*things in themselves* (that is, objects independent of our understanding) affect our sensibility. But we don't ever know *how* such affection shows itself since our understanding cannot relate to the way the things are in themselves. If, however, Kierkegaard tries to criticise Kant's conception *that things in themselves* affect us, then he gives up his own presupposition, namely that the two sources of the mind, understanding and sensibility, are radically independent of each other. If, on the other hand, Kierkegaard claims to know *how* the things in themselves affect us, then he would be implicitly claiming to have grasped reality in the form of an intellectual intuition. Therefore, it follows from Kierkegaard's own position that he, in one way or another, must separate between the fact *that* things in themselves affect us and *how* they do so and hence he must at least implicitly agree with Kant's conception. Since all of these three possible ways of making sense of Kierkegaard's passage fail, in 2.2 I turn to what I call Kierkegaard's *implicit* critique of Kant. First of all, I argue that it is crucial for Kant's epistemology to specify the conditions of the rules of the understanding in such a way that an *a priori* unification or relation to reality becomes possible. Such a relation implies an *a priori* unity of the understanding and reality, in the sense that the rules of the understanding are a necessary presupposition of reality. Accordingly, a connection between two incidents in nature (if x, then y) is not only estab-

lished *a posteriori*, but also *a priori*. Thereby reality becomes objective. As I will demonstrate, it is by means of the unity of the *transcendental apperception* that, according to Kant, the understanding is capable of relating to reality in such a way. If the rules of the understanding meet this basic condition, are we capable of gaining true theoretical situatedness. Only by means of this uppermost and fundamental condition can an *a priori* agreement or unity between the two sources of the mind become possible. It is this crucial claim of Kant's epistemology with which Kierkegaard disagrees. As Kierkegaard sees it, it is impossible that such kind of orientation can be established in this way, that is, *theoretically*. According to Kierkegaard, the understanding cannot agree with reality *a priori* and cannot be a necessary condition of its possibility. Correspondingly, it is Kierkegaard's conviction that we cannot *mediate* the understanding *a priori* with reality so that an objective system of existence becomes possible. With respect to theoretical knowledge Kierkegaard is an empiricist and considers every *a priori* knowledge of nature to be an impossibility. In 2.3 I briefly turn to a discussion of the fact that Kierkegaard's theory of nature departs from Hegel's thinking in even more fundamental ways than from Kant's. Whereas Kant is a transcendental idealist *and*, at the same time, an empirical realist and hence shares this latter characteristic with Kierkegaard's conception, Hegel is in no way an empirical realist.

3. Double-Mindedness or the Failure of an Orientation of the Will. In this chapter I explore the failure of our orientation insofar as our *will* is concerned and insofar as our will faces a moral situation. Correspondingly I examine the question of the ways our attitudes can fail with respect to those patterns which determine what we should do. In terms of Kierkegaard's theory of stages, basic characteristics of the so-called *aesthetic* stage come to the fore. I refer primarily to the *Groundwork* and to Kierkegaard's *Purity of Heart*. In 3.1 I contend both Kant and Kierkegaard are committed to the view that we can *either* let our will be determined by non-moral *or* moral principles. When it comes to non-moral principles (what Kierkegaard calls double-mindedness) both Kant and Kierkegaard claim that the human being is fully responsible for her attitude. In 3.2 I argue that the basic structure of what Kant calls hypothetical imperatives reflects the basic structure of what Kierkegaard calls double-mindedness. The kind of willing concerned is *conditional* upon the end: if you want y, then will and do x; one wants y by means of x. Thereby wanting y and willing x are set apart from one another in a characteristic way. We may not be

in agreement with our innermost destination and correspondingly the orientation or what Kierkegaard calls ‘willing one thing’ fails. In 3.3 I focus on one kind of hypothetical imperative, the precept of *prudence*. According to Kant and Kierkegaard prudence is that attitude which tries to realise the end of happiness. However, I argue that here Kierkegaard’s account of a prudent or double-minded will is richer and more detailed than Kant’s. In particular, I refer to the elaboration which he realises by means of distinguishing between that prudence which is directed *inwardly* and that which is directed *outwardly*, as well as by means of distinguishing between *active* and *passive* prudential willing. Although Kierkegaard’s conception is more differentiated than Kant’s, I argue that he nevertheless makes use of the framework articulated by Kant. Finally, in 3.4 I consider in greater detail how hypothetical imperatives as the prudential attitude are characteristic of a disoriented will. I show that this practical knowledge is rooted in time since counsels of prudence are time-dependent. With this in the background, we begin to see why a prudential attitude is characteristic of a disoriented will.

4. The Ethical Stage. In this chapter I show that Kant’s conception of ethics and the corresponding orientation which arises share decisive features with the ethical stage of existence in Kierkegaard. In 4.1 I outline the main features of that principle upon which a moral will is based: the *categorical imperative*. For this reason I mainly refer to the second *section* of the *Groundwork*. As opposed to hypothetical imperatives, the categorical imperative is not conditional on an end, but is unconditionally valid and sets the end itself. Correspondingly, the main characteristics are its strict *universality*, its *objectivity* and its *rationality*. These features (each of which I discuss in turn) cannot be separated from one another. They illuminate from different angles the constitution of the categorical imperative. In 4.2 I then turn to Kierkegaard and show that each of the characteristics of this principle of morality can be discerned in his account of (‘first’) ethics. I base my view especially on a reading of *Fear and Trembling*. First of all, I argue that for Kierkegaard the ethical is the universal (as is repeatedly affirmed in *Fear and Trembling*) and that this kind of universality can be understood to be analogous to the categorical imperative. Correspondingly, Kierkegaard (like Kant) considers any possible *exception* to the categorical imperative to be tantamount to moral failure. Finally, I turn to the rationality of the categorical imperative. According to Kant, a will is rational or practically reasonable only if it can be *derived* from this very principle. Practical derivation of this sort has its

analogy in the theoretical sphere. Theoretically, this denotes the capacity to *infer* from one assertion to another. This characteristic comes to the fore in Kierkegaard's repeated claim that the ethical can be *mediated*. Although Kierkegaard uses Hegelian terminology here, I contend that mediation reflects a Kantian theoretical structure. Since such mediation or theoretical inference can be understood as one example of what Kierkegaard calls 'objective reflection', we can also say that it must be possible for the ethical to be reflected objectively in terms of such inferences. In 4.3 I raise the question of how the ethical thus understood is capable of being *justified*. In order to do so I first turn to a consideration of the *third* section of the *Groundwork*. According to Kant, the categorical imperative as an unconditional law must be rooted in human freedom. However, neither the categorical imperative nor freedom can, in the end, be justified positively. Any such justification or comprehension presupposes a *condition* under which we can make it intelligible, but since the categorical imperative as the law of freedom is an unconditional law, it cannot rest on any such condition. While Kant at least *tries* to deduce the categorical imperative but ultimately fails, any such attempt is given up by Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*. Nevertheless, I will argue that he too is convinced that morality has its basis in freedom. At the end of this section I address the problem of justification in *Either/Or II* where Kierkegaard departs from the exact Kantian views on this issue. As Judge William, the chief representative of the ethical stage, sees it, both the free decision for a moral will no less than the free decision for an immoral will seems to be preceded by free choice to will morality *and* non-morality. Conversely, not to commit to this prior choice, that is, not to will the good and the bad seems to allow a life-view which is impossible according to Kant: the realm of the aesthetic is held to be *indifferent* to the good or the bad. However, as I will argue, this 'justification' of the ethical and the merely aesthetic may not reflect a consistent conception since willing the good and the bad can itself be understood as a moral choice. Correspondingly, not willing the good and the bad can be understood as an immoral choice. Hence the conception found in *Either/Or II* may be Kantian after all. In the Appendix to this chapter, I contend that radical evil as a failure of orientation, as understood by Kant in the *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, should be construed to be basically one and the same way as what, according to Kierkegaard, is subjectively experienced as *guilt* by the individual and what objectively is *sin*. According to Kant, radical evil is *incomprehensible* and *absolute* whereby these features

are internally connected with one another. I argue that this is equally true for the view Kierkegaard expresses in the *Concept of Anxiety*, especially with respect to the feature of incomprehensibility.

5. The Religious Conception in *Purity of Heart* and *Postscript*. In this chapter, I will discuss the religious conception (in the sense of what Kierkegaard calls 'Religiousness A') as this is presented in *Purity of Heart* and the *Postscript*, and examine the relation of this conception to Kantian ethics. First of all I bring into view the extent of agreement between their conceptions, referring in particular to the *first* section of the *Groundwork* where Kant discusses basic features of morality independent of its specific articulation as the categorical imperative (5.1–5.3). Thereafter I discuss an important difference between their conceptions (5.4). In 5.1 I introduce Kant's concept of a good will as the only unconditional good and demonstrate that according to Kierkegaard the religious will is a will of this sort. The unconditional nature of this will is, for Kierkegaard, what justifies calling such a will 'unified' or giving truthful orientation. In 5.2 I contend that both Kant and Kierkegaard sharply distinguish between an unconditional, and in *this* sense infinite/eternal, human will and the absolute goodness of a *holy* will. The fundamental *finiteness* of the human good thereby comes to the fore and corresponds to the fact that we are *required* to will the good. The good is a duty. I then turn to the question of where such a requirement is rooted. According to Kant and Kierkegaard it is rooted in our ordinary and common implicit preconception of what it means to be a good human being. Both agree that the good cannot be *taught* but has to be *elucidated*. In 5.3 I discuss two analytical implications of the fact that the good will is the sole unconditional good. In 5.3.1 I make intelligible Kant's claim that 'truly' willing the good must arise *from* duty. We do not will the good insofar as we simply will (and act) in accordance with duty. As I also briefly show, this Kantian claim is fundamentally characteristic of Kierkegaard's conception of a religious will (as exemplified in *Purity of Heart*). In 5.3.2 I turn to the second conclusion Kant draws: his claim that willing the good must be determined by a *universal principle*. Again, I argue that Kierkegaard's conception of the religious self is in agreement with Kant in this respect. Finally I examine in 5.4 the extent to which Kierkegaardian religiousness is indeed different from Kantian morality. In (5.1–5.3) I abstract from the fact that, according to Kant, the categorical imperative is the only possible universal practical principle. Here, however, I argue that Kierkegaard's religious will does not rest on a specifically Kantian universal principle. As we

see in (4.1) a will which is practically reasonable must be capable of being derived from the categorical imperative. I argue that while this is a necessary condition for a moral will, it is not a necessary condition for a religious will as Kierkegaard conceives it. Rather, with respect to Kantian universality, the religious will must be understood as an *exception*. Whereas the ethical, according to Kierkegaard, can be *mediated* (that is, reflected upon theoretically), the religious cannot be thought in such a way. Instead we must come to see that the religious is not reasonable in this sense; quite characteristically Kierkegaard calls such a will *contradictory* or *paradoxical*.

6. The Christian Stage of Existence and its Departure from Kant. In the final chapter of this book I examine the Christian stage of existence and its relation to Kant. In this way we return to Kant's ethics and to his epistemology. In addition we return to Kierkegaard's ethical and religious stages in order to bring into view how they differ from each other as well as how they both differ from the Christian stage. In 6.1 I examine the Christian stage (as it is presented in *Practice in Christianity* and the *Postscript*) from the practical viewpoint of our will or from what Kierkegaard calls subjective reflection. I show that Jesus as the Christ or the God-man is the decisive point of reference at this stage of existence. Whereas at the ethical and religious stages the individual is supposed to base her life upon some kind of universal law, at the Christian stage it is the *particularity* of the God-man upon which the individual is to ground her will and her principles. Correspondingly, the ethical and religious command can be found inwardly and must be elucidated, but the Christian command is taught and comes from outside the individual. However, the kind of teaching which is characteristic of the God-man is, as I demonstrate, indeed different from every ordinary kind of teaching. The God-man teaches by revealing his love and grace and we are taught by *believing in him* and by *imitating him*. It is at this point in Kierkegaard's thinking where every affinity to Kantian morality comes to an end. In 6.2 I discuss the object of faith or the God-man (as presented in the *Postscript*) insofar as we reflect upon him objectively, that is, insofar as we (try to) think this object. In particular, I argue – against recent interpreters – that the conception of the God-man entails a *logical* contradiction or is logically invalid in the strict sense. In other words, it is impossible to think the object of faith since, according to both Kant and Kierkegaard, thinking must necessarily be in accordance with the principle of contradiction. Because Kierkegaard nevertheless recommends that we base our lives upon this object of faith (although he,

too, admits that we cannot think it) he again radically departs from Kant. As I discuss in some detail, it is just this kind of contradiction which distinguishes the religious from the Christian stage. Whereas the religious stage entails a paradox because it is not *reasonable*, the Christian stage is furthermore paradoxical (*absurd*) since we cannot *understand* the object of faith at all any more. Christian faith, as Kierkegaard sees it, cannot be understood but has to be lived.

Chapter 1

In Search of a Theory of Knowledge

In this first chapter, I will show that Immanuel Kant and Søren Kierkegaard share some common commitments as the starting point of their respective epistemologies. I will thus be focusing on those presuppositions that both thinkers take for granted in order to approach the question of what we are capable of knowing. Of course, this kind of comparison runs the risk of pulling apart elements of Kant's and Kierkegaard's respective epistemologies. Especially in the case of Kant, focusing on certain aspects of his theoretical thought while neglecting other important aspects is problematic since this artificially isolates issues that cannot be properly understood alone. But this will allow us to appreciate the differences in the following chapter.

I will deal primarily with aspects of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as well as Kierkegaard's *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*²¹ and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*.²² It is the aim of this discussion to bring into view the presuppositions for an epistemology which Kant and Kierkegaard have in common. An explication of these presuppositions will put us in a position to ask the question concerning true knowledge or true theoretical situatedness.

²¹ In addition to Ronald M. Green, who occasionally mentions *De Omnibus* in *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, Anthony Rudd is a further commentator who realises that the epistemic scenario sketched there is 'very Kantian'. See his 'Kierkegaard and the Sceptics' in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* vol. 6, 1998, p. 76.

²² The scenario which Kierkegaard develops in *De Omnibus* already contains many features which characterise his later and more detailed thinking in the *Postscript*. I do not see any contradiction between the distinctions Kierkegaard draws in both writings; nor do I see any further contradiction with any of Kierkegaard's other writings. One of the few interpreters who notices some continuity is Kresten Nordentoft. See his *Kierkegaard's Psychology*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1978, p. 84. That interpreters sometimes fail to acknowledge this continuity has to do with the fact that they are not so much concerned with the *meaning* of concepts as with a nominal investigation of concepts.

Kierkegaard is in agreement with several presuppositions²³ in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*: (1) For human beings the empirical manifold has to be received immediately, as opposed to the mediation of thinking through its corresponding rules,²⁴ for thinking is most fundamentally characterised by concepts (as 'analytic unities') and judgements and must be in accordance with the rules of general logic; (2) both Kant and Kierkegaard start with a correspondence theory of truth and agree that formal logic is incapable of defeating sceptical arguments (arguments of doubt) and hence incapable of arriving at a positive determination of truth or theoretical situatedness; (3) both are convinced that to receive the empirical manifold means to receive it through what Kant calls 'empirical consciousness', which is most importantly determined by time; (4) finally, both Kant and Kierkegaard place human finiteness at the core of their analysis of the human being and hold that we do not have any access to infinity as a kind of infinite knowledge of an object through an original act of creation or intellectual intuition.

1.1 Immediate and Mediate Representation

According to Kant our faculty of knowledge rests upon two fundamental bases: the faculty of intuition and the faculty of understanding. Intuitions can be described as immediate and that are not determined or interpreted. An intuition is a 'single' (B377) and 'immediate representation' (B41) that contains 'a manifold' (B102). As *such* intuitions do not give determinate knowledge of objects. We receive 'objects' immediately, but such reception is not qualified. As such, intuitions provide the *raw data* for the representation of determined objects only.²⁵ Correspondingly, Kierkegaard claims that 'Immediacy is reality [*Realitet*] Immediacy is precisely indeterminateness' (IV B1 146, 145).

Now if intuitions as mere raw data are the only type of entity there is, then the question of a true point of theoretical situatedness cannot

²³ These presuppositions do not concern his transcendental doctrine, i. e. the doctrine that we cannot represent an object unless representation is made possible by concepts of an object (categories) which themselves are rooted in the transcendental apperception.

²⁴ I would like to emphasise again that with respect to Kant, in this chapter I will not focus primarily on the *transcendental* employment of the understanding. I discuss this in Chapter 2.

²⁵ As W.H. Walsh *Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics*, Edingburgh: Edingburgh University Press 1975, p. 15, puts it, they are only *proleptically* the awareness of a particular.

even arise. To speak with Kant: ‘truth or illusion is not in the object insofar it is intuited’ (B350). Kierkegaard puts it in a similar way: ‘In immediacy there is no relation, for as soon as there is a relation, immediacy is cancelled. Immediately, therefore, everything is true, but this truth is untruth the very next moment, for in immediacy everything is untrue. If consciousness can remain in immediacy, then the question of truth is cancelled’ (IV B1 146–147). If everything is immediacy or if all there is consists of indeterminate and immediate empirical intuitions, then everything is equally real, even what is false. We are not even in a position to consider the *question* of truth, that is, to allow that something is possibly true or possibly false.²⁶ Thrown into a world of intuitions, there is neither truth nor illusion. We could not even doubt in the sense of being undecided about the truth or falseness of an issue since we are not on this side of the question of truth.

If something should have the capacity of being true or false at all, it is inevitable to relate to it in one way or another. We need to relate to objects in such a way that the question of truth is not made impossible. Truth or falsehood can, strictly speaking, only exist in judgements. Accordingly, the second fundamental basis of our faculty of knowledge is the understanding. The understanding is ‘the mind’s power of producing representations from itself’ (A51 / B75). This production of representations is the production of concepts. As Kant claims, ‘from the understanding arise concepts’ (A19 / B33). Concepts play a crucial role in constituting judgements. Hence Kant most importantly characterises concepts as ‘predicates of possible judgements’ and the understanding as the ‘*faculty of judgement*’ (A69 / B94).

Since ‘immediacy’ (immediate undetermined empirical intuitions) alone cannot evoke the question of truth, Kierkegaard asks: ‘But how, then, is immediacy cancelled?’ (IV B1 146). According to Kant ‘imme-

²⁶ For Kant, this possibility finally rests in the categories being rooted in the transcendental apperception as he wants to show in the paragraphs 15–21 of the Transcendental Deduction. Thus the conditions of judgement are specified in such a way that they gain what he calls *objective validity*. In other words, he wants to show that objective validity (the capacity of judgements to be *objectively* true or false) is an inherent trait of all judgements. However, Kant abstracts from this before he enters the analyses of the Transcendental Deduction. Accordingly he presupposes that judgement is – if at all – the place of truth and illusion before he enters the corresponding discussions. Therefore he leaves it open in some sense as to whether a judgement can be *objectively* true or false (objectively valid) before entering the Transcendental Deduction.

diacy' or reality as it is in itself is 'cancelled',²⁷ not only because of the very fact that we receive objects through the *a priori* and subjective forms of intuition, but in some sense also by the very application of thinking (the faculty of judgements) to it: Insofar as we relate to objects by making *judgements* about them, insofar as we describe reality, we access it in a way which is not immediate. Hence the immediate access to reality is cancelled (Kierkegaard) or withdrawn (Kant) in the basic epistemological situation in which we find ourselves.²⁸ We never know how the objects as they are in themselves affect us. If we did, our understanding would immediately create the object with respect to its existence or it would be intuitive (1.4). But it is not and the finite relation of the understanding *as* an act of judgement is the very 'price' that we have to pay for truth to be possible: 'Truth or illusion is ... *in the judgment* about it [the object], in so far as it is thought', according to Kant. (A293 / B350). With Kant we can therefore say that the question of truth arises by means of a relation to objects through judgement since it is only judgements that can be true or false.²⁹ Kierkegaard implicitly agrees with this, I think, since he states: 'How does the question of truth arise? By way of untruth, because the moment I ask about truth, I have already asked about untruth' (IV B1 146). The question of truth can only be asked if untruth is a possible alternative and – once again – this can only be the case in the context of a judgement.

According to Kierkegaard the cancellation of an immediate access to reality (objects as they are in themselves) takes place because of our application of language³⁰ (ideality) to it. This application is done in a *mediate* manner: 'What is mediacy? It is the word' (IV B1 146). The idea of a mediate relation to objects given in empirical intuition is reminiscent of Kant since a concept refers to it [the object] mediately by means of a feature which several things may have in common'

²⁷ One should speak of a withdrawal rather than a cancellation of immediately given intuitions with respect to Kant's epistemology. What is withdrawn from us is the way in which our sense perception is affected independently of any conceptualization (relation) of the understanding.

²⁸ A similar scenario is present in Hegel's introduction to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Here, the very same problem (with obvious reference to Kant) is discussed. For example, Hegel says: 'Denn ist das Erkennen das Werkzeug, sich des absoluten Wesens zu bemächtigen, so fällt zugleich auf, dass die Anwendung eines Werkzeugs auf eine Sache sie vielmehr nicht lässt, wie sie für sich ist, sondern eine Formierung und Veränderung mit ihr vornimmt. ... Wir gebrauchen ... ein Mittel, welches unmittelbar das Gegenteil seines Zwecks hervorbringt ...', Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1986, p. 68 f.

²⁹ Compare footnote 26.

(A320 / B377). In other words, we relate to objects indirectly or within the paradigm of conceptuality. The general description provided by a feature of a concept can also be predicated of other objects (contained under that concept) and not only of the object to which it refers. In the first section of 'The Transcendental Clue to the Discovery of all Pure Concepts of the Understanding' Kant maintains:

Since no representation, save when it is an intuition, is in immediate relation to an object, no concept is ever related to an object immediately [this would be an *intuitus originarius*³¹], but to some other representation of it, be that other representation an intuition, or itself a concept. Judgement is therefore the mediate knowledge of an object, that is the representation of a representation of it (B93).³²

The representation of the representation of an object, a judgement, includes a withdrawal of the immediacy of this object. The very relation to an object involves a mediate interpretation of that which is given in an immediate manner. And because this interpretation, in spite of its being mediate, involves a reference to objects by means of an immediately given manifold, one can say that this immediacy is a 'presupposition' of every judgement that relates to such objects. Correspondingly Kierkegaard's answer to the question concerning the way in which immediacy is cancelled so that the question of truth becomes possible is as following: 'By mediacy, which cancels immediacy by *pre*-supposing it. What, then, is immediacy? It is reality itself. What is mediacy? It is the word. How does the one cancel the other? By giv-

³⁰ I abstract here from Kierkegaard's non-Kantian emphasis on language, (perhaps because of Hamann's influence on Kierkegaard). However, I consider this difference between Kant and Kierkegaard to be of minor importance with respect to the issues I discuss. In the widest sense of the word, Kant's notion of ideality denotes 'mind-dependence', his notion of reality denotes 'mind-independence' and I see no reason why Kierkegaard would not agree with this view.

³¹ See my discussion in 1.4.

³² In the following sentences Kant gives an illuminating example of this characteristic of our language: 'In every judgement there is a concept which holds of many representations, and among them of a given representation that is immediately related to an object. Thus in the judgement 'all bodies are divisible', the concept of the divisible applies to various other concepts, but is here applied in particular to the concept of body, and this concept again to certain appearances that present themselves to us. These objects, therefore, are mediately represented through the concepts of divisibility' (B93). I cannot do justice to the details of Kant's theory of judgement here. Henry E. Allison *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1983, pp. 65–73, provides an excellent analysis of this theory including a thoroughgoing interpretation of the above quote.

ing expression to it, for that which is given expression is always *presupposed*' (IV B1 146).

Let us have a closer look at how the understanding shows itself according to Kant. From this, we shall see that the understanding involves a basic principle – the principle of contradiction. For Kant, judgements are rooted in operations of the understanding which he calls 'functions'. This activity or capacity must be understood as the capacity of *uniting* in virtue of rules: '[C]oncepts rest on functions. By 'function' I mean the unity of the act of bringing various representations under one common representation' (B93). As we have seen concepts are always *general* entities: a concept is of such a nature that it 'holds of many representations' (B93), as Kant puts it. The operations of the understanding bring singular and undetermined representations, that is, empirically given intuitions, into a form so that they hold of many representations. It is (first of all) this spontaneity which Kant calls 'analysis': 'By means of analysis different representations are brought under one concept' (B104).³³ To bring different singular representations under a concept is precisely that activity or function in which concepts originate with respect to their form which holds for many representations.³⁴

Concepts are 'predicates of possible judgements' (B94) as Kant claims. Only insofar as a concept relates to another in the context of a judgement, is it possible to speak of knowledge: 'Now the only use which the understanding can make of these concepts is to judge by means of them. ... Accordingly, all judgements are functions of unity

³³ Accordingly, Kant says in his *Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik I*: 'Da die allgemeine Logik von allem Inhalte des Erkenntnisses durch Begriffe, oder von aller Materie des Denkens abstrahirt: so kann sie den Begriff nur in Rücksicht seiner Form, d. h. nur subjectivisch erwägen; nicht wie er durch ein Merkmal ein Object bestimmt, sondern nur, wie er auf mehrere Objecte kann bezogen werden. Die allgemeine Logik hat also nicht die Quelle der Begriffe zu untersuchen; nicht wie Begriffe als Vorstellungen entspringen, sondern lediglich, wie gegebene Vorstellungen im Denken zu Begriffen werden', Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1977, p. 94.

³⁴ As Michael Wolff *Die Vollständigkeit der kantischen Urteilstafel*, Frankfurt am Main: Walter de Gruyter 1995, p. 66, correctly puts it: 'Nicht aufgrund davon, dass eine bestimmte Vorstellung ein Begriff ist, lassen sich andere Vorstellungen ihr unterordnen. Sondern umgekehrt ist sie ein Begriff dadurch, dass ihr andere Vorstellungen untergeordnet werden'. This subordination of singular representations into a conceptual form by means of logical acts is called 'abstraction', 'comparison' and 'reflection' in Kant's *Logic* (L §1). With this background we can understand why Kant refers to concepts also as 'analytic unities' and claims correspondingly: 'The analytic unity of consciousness belongs to all general concepts, as such.' (B134, footnote)

among our representations ... and thereby much possible knowledge is collected into one' (B93–94).³⁵ Concepts must be understood as possible relations to other concepts contained under them and this possibility is based upon a unification which is, so to speak, actualised as an applied unification in the corresponding judgement. As Kant claims generally, it is in every judgement that 'the relation of a subject to a predicate is thought' (A7 / B11). Whenever I represent such relation, I represent a unity which includes the relation. According to Kant, twelve different kinds of judgements are possible in principle. This means that there are twelve different kinds of relations and unifications³⁶ of concepts in judgements that are possible in principle, and each of these different kinds of unification correspond to the so-called forms of judgement which themselves correspond to the above mentioned concepts as possible relations to other concepts contained under them. As Kant believes, the forms of judgements are complete and are derived from one principle, namely the understanding as the faculty of judgement.³⁷ Since the corresponding judgmental rules stem from this very faculty, we can conclude that the possibility of truth (and doubt) must do justice to them.

However, concepts denote the possibility of truth in yet another way. It is impossible to conceive of a possible relation between concepts, which is logically contradictory. The concept 'being married' cannot possibly be contained under the concept 'bachelor'. That is, it is impossible to analyse the latter concept in such a way, and hence it is impossible to unify the corresponding representations as stemming from an activity of the understanding. This impossibility, again, shows itself as a 'real' impossibility only insofar as it is actualised in a judgement ('A bachelor is married'). At this point we can see that the rules of the understanding as denoting what can possibly count as knowl-

³⁵ In Reflection 3045 Kant expresses this in a precise way when he says: 'Ein Begriff hat vermöge seiner Gemeingültigkeit die Funktion eines Urteils. Er bezieht sich auf andere Begriffe potentialiter. Die wirkliche Beziehung eines Begriffs auf andere als ein Mittel ihrer Erkenntnis ist das Urteil. Dadurch wird unsere Erkenntnis deutlich'.

³⁶ In the following, I will, for the sake of brevity, speak of *the* unity of the understanding. Let us keep in mind that according to Kant, in accord with the twelve different ways of judging, there are twelve different ways for the understanding to unify which are principally possible.

³⁷ Most thinkers of German Idealism felt – understandably – very uneasy with this claim and attacked Kant heavily. Whether Kant did derive a complete account of the forms of judgement from the capacity to judge is still an open question. Compare in this connection especially, Klaus Reich *Die Vollständigkeit der kantischen Urteilstafel*, Berlin: Diss. Rostock 1932 and Michael Wolff's book of the same title.

edge must be in accordance with a basic principle. It is the fundamental principle of the understanding – *the principle of contradiction*. This is the crucial principle for what Kant calls ‘general logic’: ‘The proposition that no predicate contradictory of a thing can belong to it, is entitled the principle of contradiction, and is a universal, though merely negative, criterion of all truth’ (B190). ‘The universal, though merely negative, condition of all our judgements in general, whatever be the content of our knowledge, and however it may relate to the object, is that they be not self-contradictory; for if self-contradictory, these judgements are in themselves, even without reference to the object, null and void’ (B189). From here we can conclude that the understanding, as the faculty of rules that unify possible relations (concepts) and actual relations (judgements), fundamentally implies and takes for granted the principle of contradiction.

Kierkegaard clearly does not have an elaborate theory of judgement as does Kant. However, he agrees that concepts by their very definition are general entities. This means that they stem from abstraction, as he calls it. To think is by its very definition abstract and in this broad sense ‘it is proper to ask about it [actuality] abstractly’ (VII 258 / SKS 7, 274). To think always means to a certain extent to think that which is general, its medium is the general and everything which is thought is thought as general. In order to think the particular or the accidental it is – Kierkegaard acknowledges (cf. VII 258 / SKS 7, 274) – inevitable to determine it generally.

Now, there is no doubt, I think, that with regard to theoretical knowledge, Kierkegaard considers the principle of contradiction first of all to be a *necessary* condition of truth with regard to our theoretical situatedness. He time and again accuses Hegel of having cancelled the principle of contradiction (cf. VII 261 / SKS 7, 277; cf. VII 264 / SKS 7, 281). Secondly, a logical system (opposed to a system of existence) as being concerned with systematic or abstract thought is a possible and legitimate way of thinking. Of course, we cannot immediately identify systematic thought as the allegedly ‘highest’ thought with thought or conceptualization in general. However, as we have seen the latter inevitably does involve some kind of abstraction and I do not see any evidence in Kierkegaard’s writings for assuming that the corresponding conceptualisation could violate the principle of contradiction. However, as I will show in the last chapter, Kierkegaard himself will cancel the principle of contradiction *with regard to the basis of Christian belief*, i. e. with regard to the God-man. Correspondingly, it will be impossible to think or conceive of this basis theoretically.

Let us look more closely at Kant's and Kierkegaard's account of theoretical truth. So far we have seen that the question of truth *arises* by means of thinking within the context of judgements (language) and that it is a necessary condition that we shall not contradict ourselves logically. Nevertheless this condition is negative and we will have to examine this further.

1.2 Truth as Correspondence Between Thinking and Objects

In the following I want to *focus* on Kant's and Kierkegaard's conception of truth. The problem of truth is of special importance because it sheds light upon the agreement as well as the disagreement of Kierkegaard's and Kant's theoretical thinking, which we will consider in the next chapter. Truth is a key concept for both thinkers and it is already clear from the above analysis that it is internally connected with the concept of unity.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the concept of truth plays a crucial role.³⁸ Kant introduces it in the third and fourth part of the introduction to the *Transcendental Logic* which is called 'Idea of a Transcendental Logic' (A50 / B74). In particular he introduces this concept with respect to the difference between general or formal logic and transcendental logic. How exactly does general logic relate to the concept of truth and how does this relate to the truth of transcendental logic? In the beginning of the third section of the above mentioned introduction Kant famously says:

The question, famed of old, by which logicians were supposed to be driven into a corner, obliged either to have recourse to a pitiful sophism, or to confess their ignorance and consequently the emptiness of their whole art, is the question: What is truth? The nominal definition of truth, that it is the agreement of knowledge with its object, is assumed as granted; the question asked is as to what is the general and sure criterion of truth of any and every knowledge (A58-B82).

The title of this third section ('The Division of General Logic into Analytic and Dialectic') makes it clear that Kant means by 'logicians' those logicians who are concerned with formal logic. Those people by

³⁸ Although the concept itself appears rather rarely in the *Critique*, it is obvious that the corresponding problem is of decisive importance. This is already indicated by the fact that Kant uses the concept of truth in order to *introduce* the main problem of the *Transcendental Logic*, that is, the problem of an *a priori* application of the understanding to intuitions.

whom these logicians are ‘supposed to be driven into a corner’ are the (ancient) sceptics.³⁹ However, this passage already shows that in some sense this was not *necessarily* so. Why is it impossible for the logicians to answer the sceptical question about truth and what kind of misunderstanding may be on the side of the sceptics themselves? Both the sceptics and their opponents consider truth to consist formally in an agreement of *intellectus* and *res*. This agreement cannot be determined *a posteriori*. If we consider truth as ‘the agreement of thinking with being’, then it ‘is an approximating whose beginning cannot be established absolutely’ (VII 157 / *SKS* 7,174; cf. IV B1 146) as Kierkegaard claims. However, an *a priori* agreement of *intellectus* and *res* is impossible for the logician (understood by Kant as dealing with formal logic) to arrive at:

A general criterion of truth must be such as would be valid in each and every instance of knowledge, however their objects may vary. It is obvious however that such a criterion [being general] cannot take account of the [varying] content of knowledge (relation to its [specific] object). But since truth concerns just this very content, it is quite impossible, and indeed absurd, to ask for a general test of the truth of such content (A58 f. / B83).

The formal logician cannot answer the question about the nature of truth, because his discipline simply is not concerned with an *a priori* relation to empirical objects that involves making a distinction between these objects and any other objects the mind’s thinking may simply invent⁴⁰. General logic is characterised precisely by abstracting from such differences and hence is incapable of giving a sufficient criterion for the agreement of knowledge and objects in space and time. However, this certainly does not imply that general logic is invalid. But it means it is essentially *insufficient* in respect of the determination of truth. Truth cannot do *without* general logic since it is a necessary condition of it; it is, as Kant puts it, ‘the *negative* condition of all

³⁹ Compare Gerold Prauss ‘Zum Wahrheitsproblem bei Kant’ in *Kant. Zur Deutung seiner Theorie von Erkennen und Handeln*, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch 1973, p. 74.

⁴⁰ An *invention of an object* does not presuppose a synthesis of the given manifold and hence does not refer to an object in space and time. We can think whatever we would like (if only we do justice to the principle of contradiction). But such thinking does not amount to the knowledge of an object according to Kant: ‘To think an object and to know an object are thus by no means the same thing. Knowledge involves two factors: first, the concept through which an object in general is thought (the category); and secondly, the intuition, through which it is given. For if no intuition would be given corresponding to the concept, the concept would still indeed be a thought, so far as its form is concerned, but would be without any object, and no knowledge of anything would be possible by means of it.’ (B146)

truth' (A59 f. / B84). But the corresponding rules of the understanding do not determine truth sufficiently either; they do not decide whether knowledge 'contains *positive* truth' (A59 / B84):

[A]s regards knowledge of its mere form (leaving aside all content), it is evident that logic, in so far as it expounds the universal and necessary rules of the understanding, must in these rules furnish criteria of truth. Whatever contradicts these rules is false. For the understanding would thereby be made to contradict its own general rules of thought, and so contradict itself. These criteria, however, concern only the form of truth, that is of thought in general; and in so far they are quite correct, but are not, by themselves, sufficient. For although our knowledge may be in complete accordance with logical demands, that is, may not contradict itself, it is still possible that it may be in contradiction with its object. The purely logical criterion of truth, namely, the agreement of knowledge with the general and formal laws of the understanding and reason, is a *conditio sine qua non*, and is therefore the negative condition of all truth. But further than this logic cannot go. It has no touchstone for the discovery of such error as concerns not the form but the content (A59 f. / B83 f.).

With this long quote from the *Critique of Pure Reason* in mind, I would first of all like to refer to Kierkegaard's overall characterisation of truth. With regard to theoretical knowledge Kierkegaard determines truth in the same traditional manner as Kant does, either empirically as 'the agreement of thinking with being' (see above) or idealistically as 'the agreement of being with thinking' (VII 157 / SKS 7, 174; cf. IV B1 146). If one understands 'being' abstractly, 'as the abstract rendition or the abstract prototype of what being in concreto is as empirical being' (VII 158 / SKS 7, 174) then 'nothing stands in the way of abstractly defining truth as something finished' (VII 158 / SKS 7, 174). The agreement can be said to be true. Nevertheless this agreement describes a tautology: Formal thinking agrees with formal thinking and hence 'the agreement spoken of is only an abstract identity with itself' (VII 158 / 7, 174). And there is no doubt that Kierkegaard, like Kant considers formal logic as such incapable of answering the question of positive truth. Formal logic and its abstraction 'will never come any further' (VII 158 / SKS 7, 175). The laws of formal logic (and then a logical system that presupposes formal logic) do not say anything positive about objects. They do not say anything positive about the way the (inner or outer) world is represented in empirical consciousness. This means that a system of existence, as Kierkegaard would call it, cannot be built upon them. Formal logic is incapable of describing 'the nature' of the relation between ideality (thinking) and reality (empirical being) and hence is incapable of arriving at a positive determination of truth. Hence the sceptical question 'What is truth?' cannot be answered by the logician dealing with a formal logic

which is based upon abstraction. The logician is simply not concerned with this kind of truth. The very fact therefore that the sceptic aims at getting an answer from the logician means at the same time that he (the sceptic) is trapped in a misunderstanding. The sceptic himself is not aware of the kind of investigation with which the logician is occupied or of which he is capable. The sceptic therefore does not know 'what questions may reasonably be asked' and does not thereby provide a 'great and necessary proof of [his] sagacity and insight' (A58 / B82).

Truth is the agreement between knowledge and its object (Kant) or the agreement between thinking and (empirical) being (Kierkegaard). Both Kant and Kierkegaard formally agree upon this 'nominal definition of truth' (A58 / B82) with regard to theoretical knowledge. Both are aware that a 'sure criterion of the truth' (A58 / B82) can neither be provided by general logic and its abstractions, nor can it be provided empirically and hence *a posteriori*. And both are convinced that only if such a criterion, however construed, can be found, will it be possible to understand what truth or a true theoretical situatedness is and only thereby will the specific content or the specific nature of the agreement between thinking and being emerge. To look for such a basic agreement between thinking and being is nothing other than to look for a basic and grounding unity or unification between the two entities. Therefore, again, the question of theoretical truth is closely related to the question of unity. Both Kant and Kierkegaard are at pains to find a dimension of 'real ideality' or 'ideal reality' and hold that this unity must be found within the resources of the human being. As we will see in the next chapter, however, as opposed to Kant, Kierkegaard rejects the possibility of arriving at such truth theoretically and hence rejects Kant's idealistic solution which claims that an agreement of being with thinking is made possible in virtue of the fact that the transcendental apperception is the very origin of the understanding. Therefore he will claim that 'real ideality' or 'ideal reality' is possible only if we consider the human being as determined by principles that belong to the practical sphere.

1.3 Empirical Consciousness and its Rootedness in Time

According to Kant, the place where understanding and sensibility come into contact with each other is empirical consciousness. With 'the place' I am not referring to the legitimate basis of an *a priori* application of the understanding to objects received in space and time (this is

what Kierkegaard rejects as we will see in the second chapter), but to that entity where such a possible application can be actualised. Inner sense or empirical consciousness is a time-dependent awareness of sense-affections being determined by (empirical) concepts. It is that kind of medium in which a synthesis of the understanding with the manifold must be realised or actualised despite the fact that objects cannot at all be positively determined in virtue of determinations of the inner sense only. The ‘manifold’ we become aware of in consciousness and that is responsible for us being affected is received through space and time. Space and time are *a priori* forms of sensibility according to Kant. Each of them is ‘the subjective condition of sensibility’:

Since, then, the receptivity of the subject, its capacity to be affected by objects, must necessarily precede all intuitions of these objects, it can readily be understood how the form of all appearances can be given prior to all actual perceptions, and so exist in the mind *a priori*, and how, as a pure intuition, in which all objects must be determined, it can contain, prior to all experience, principles which determine the relations of these objects (A26 / B42).

Space and time are discussed in the so-called *Transcendental Aesthetic*, in which Kant tries to demonstrate the truth of the above assertion. However, there is one main difference between space and time. Whereas space is an *a priori* form or an *a priori* intuition by which objects are represented as outside us (in the so-called outer sense), *time* is an *a priori* intuition by which objects are represented as inside us in the so called ‘inner sense’ or empirical consciousness:

Inner sense, by means of which the mind intuits itself or its inner state, yields indeed no intuition of the soul itself as an object; but there is nevertheless a determinate form (namely time) in which alone the intuition of inner states is possible, and everything which belongs to inner determinations is therefore represented in relations of time (A22 / B37).

Since all objects (that affect us) including those of the outer sense are finally represented in the inner sense, time is that *a priori* condition which structures and precedes *all* objects. It is the innermost condition of us being affected by any object.⁴¹

We have already seen that immediate reality has to be unified with mediate ideality. Now we shall focus on the sphere (not the legitimate basis of justification that yields objective experience, which according to Kierkegaard is impossible) where the understanding or language

⁴¹ Therefore, it most fundamentally denotes human finiteness and is internally connected with the deepest impossibility of human beings to have access to what things are like in themselves. This we will see in the next and final section of this chapter.

may come in contact with the empirical manifold that affects us: empirical consciousness. What Kierkegaard calls the third factor is that entity where such contact⁴² between ideality and reality may take place. '[C]onsciousness ... is produced by a duplexity [*Dupplícitet*] and that itself produces a duplexity. ... The duplexity is reality and ideality; consciousness is the relation' (IV B1 147). 'Consciousness is mind [*Aand*], and it is remarkable that when one is divided in the world of mind, there are three, never two' (IV B1 148). One can *formally* say that what Kierkegaard *here* calls consciousness (in abstraction from its practical dimension) is empirical consciousness or inner sense for Kant. Reality and ideality in the widest sense as 'mind independence' and 'mind dependence' cannot come into contact with each other except in human consciousness *thus* understood. Consciousness produces the relation and can be described as being the relation. But it is at the same time produced by ideality and reality. In other words, the three entities cannot be replaced by each other. However, a unity between ideality and reality can only come into existence, ideality and reality can only come 'in contact' with each other in empirical consciousness.

The Kierkegaardian quotations from above and the talk of a unity of thinking and empirical being with regard to empirical consciousness may be very alienating to Kantians. Is it not the main aim of the *Critique* to show that the empirical manifold that hits us and that is finally received in inner sense cannot be unified and represented without the employment of the categories, themselves being rooted in the transcendental apperception? Indeed I basically agree with this view. However, I have not claimed that the empirical manifold that we receive in the inner sense requires us to refer to it as being objective or as being unified in a pure concept of an object, that is, as being categorically determined. What sense then could it possibly make to speak of a contact between ideality and reality and any unity in empirical consciousness without such determination? Kant himself is notoriously undecided on this point. Although the main purpose of the transcendental deduction is to show that all that affects me must be capable of being brought to the transcendental unity of the apperception and the categories (otherwise it would be nothing for me) Kant does also talk about a 'subjective unity in empirical consciousness, which is a determination of inner sense' (B 139) and indeed gives a corre-

⁴² Kierkegaard refers to a 'mutual contact' and a 'collision' (IV B1 147) of ideality and reality in consciousness and distinguishes it explicitly from an inquiry where 'consciousness exists only according to its possibility' (IV B1 147).

sponding example in terms of a proposition or judgement: 'If I support a body, I feel an impression of weight' (B 142).⁴³ This view may require us to claim that it is not non-Kantian to speak, as Kierkegaard does, of a contact between ideality and reality independent of categorical determinations rooted in the transcendental apperception. However, the theme of this book is a systematic reconstruction and it seems clear that Kant's view must be reconstructed in such a way that any kind of relation or contact by means of judgement with those appearances which are not categorically determined should be impossible. Hence it should be impossible to express such judgements if they are not being categorically determined.⁴⁴ The determination of inner sense then may only require us to speak of a mere association of 'ideas' (for example the *mere* association of the idea of fire and the idea of smoke) which cannot be expressed by means of judgements at all. Therefore we may or should say that 'contact' between ideality and reality is impossible according to Kant without categorical determinations as presuppositions of judgements. However, if we agree upon this view, we can still commit to Kierkegaard's (Kantian) claim that ideality and reality are connected in the inner sense or empirical consciousness, although Kant may or should be committed to the view that any such real connection is possible only, if categorically determined, a view that Kierkegaard implicitly dismisses as fantastical as we shall see more clearly in the second chapter.

Despite these differences, time plays a crucial role as a necessary precondition of the objects given in inner sense or empirical consciousness for both Kant and Kierkegaard. It is time which lies at the heart of empirical consciousness. As we have seen in the above analysis, the starting point for Kant's and Kierkegaard's search for truth and unity stems from the problem that thinking, as determined by general logic *only*, and being cannot be brought into agreement (unless 'being' is understood abstractly and then yields tautologies) with each other since *such* thinking does not provide a positive criterion of this agreement or a positive criterion of truth.

Now this impossibility of an agreement between thinking and being can be grasped from the perspective of empirical consciousness and its condition of time and thereby as the condition of any affection of objects as well. It is time which necessarily *separates* thinking from be-

⁴³ In terms of Kant's *Prolegomena*, this would be a *judgement of perception*, which according to Kant in this writing explicitly is not categorically determined.

⁴⁴ Cf. Henry E. Allison *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, pp. 148–158.

ing and the corresponding agreement and this separation expresses itself 'in succession' (VII 287 / *SKS* 7, 303): 'Existence ... is precisely the separation [between subject and object] [E]xistence has spaced and does space subject from object, thought from being' (VII 101 / *SKS* 7, 118). The very foundation of (empirical) consciousness is time. The permeation of consciousness with time is one of the very basic presuppositions of Kierkegaard's thinking as a whole. This basic determination lies at the heart of his theory of existence. Whenever Kierkegaard emphasises that the human being is 'only existing', that she is in the state of 'becoming' or in 'motion', he explicitly or implicitly refers to this fundamental dimension of our mind. We are not really capable of abstracting from this condition of our own conscious being. But it is this very condition which is responsible for our separation from truth or an agreement with being. Being (understood empirically) is only graspable through time. It is time which (first of all) so to speak says, 'now this being, now this being, now this being'.⁴⁵ Thereby it denotes the separation of thinking from being on principle since every being is necessarily an instance of time. But how should *thinking* agree with time as that which is completely different from itself?⁴⁶ For Kierkegaard, as we shall see more completely in the next chapter, such an agreement is impossible theoretically and every attempt to bring this about distracts the human being from facing and accepting her absolute condition and limit. However, for Kant, as we shall see, such agreement is possible and indeed necessary. Before I will refer to this crucial difference, I would like to focus on a shared field of agreement between Kant and Kierkegaard: their dismissal of the possibility that our understanding may be intuitive.

1.4 *The Impossibility of an Intellectual Intuition*

The faculty of sensibility is responsible for receiving objects. Since, according to Kant, these objects are *given* to human beings, they are not being *created* by them:

⁴⁵ Therefore, one could say that time not only separates thinking from being, but represents the very idea of separation.

⁴⁶ As we will see in the next chapter, it is Kant's attempt in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to unite thinking with time in order to establish an *a priori* agreement between them and it is this solution of the separation of the two sources of knowledge with which Kierkegaard disagrees.

[Sensibility] is derivative (*intuitus derivativus*), not original (*intuitus originarius*), and therefore not an intellectual intuition. ... such intellectual intuition seems to belong solely to the primordial being, and can never be ascribed to a dependent being, dependent in its existence as well as in its intuition, and which through that intuition determines its existence solely in relation to given objects (B72).

The necessity of receiving objects characterises our very dependency and *finiteness*. Our reception of objects requires that we be *affected* by them. Hence ‘all intuitions, as sensible, rest on affections’ (A68 / B93). Whereas the object that is not conceived of as being received (but is conceived of as being the cause of our sense-affection) is not accessible to us (cf. Bxxviii). We simply do not know what the object is like *in itself*. Only God or ‘the primordial being’ has access to these objects or *things in themselves* since he creates them in the very moment of his intuition. Human beings, on the contrary, are affected by *things in themselves* without ever being in a position to know how they really are.

Time as the unconditional condition of empirical consciousness denotes the very finiteness of the human being. Kant’s as well as Kierkegaard’s conception expresses finiteness at its very heart.⁴⁷ Human consciousness is finite through and through.⁴⁸ The awareness of certain items in consciousness is not such that we approach or understand them as they really are in themselves. Time as the condition of our reception of sense data denotes the very impossibility of doing so. This indicates that Kierkegaard’s thinking, no less than Kant’s, takes human beings’ finiteness as seriously as possible. Time denotes our very separation from being. It denotes that the human being is not in a position to understand being absolutely. Such an understand-

⁴⁷ I share Merold Westphal’s astonishment that Ronald M. Green *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, does not really discuss this basic presupposition (along with its opposition to divine knowledge) which is shared by Kant and Kierkegaard. See Merold Westphal *Becoming a Self*, West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press 1996, pp. 96 f.

⁴⁸ The fact that according to *The Sickness Unto Death* human consciousness is a ‘synthesis of the infinite and the finite’ (XI 128) is not in contradiction with the above assertion. Human beings are capable of being infinite (ethical/religious/Christian determinations of the self) – if we *presuppose* their basic finiteness in the sense of an incapacity to intuit the object intellectually. Cf. Chapter 5. This claim of mine corresponds with some of the interpretations in Arne Grøn’s essay ‘Temporality in Kierkegaard’s Edifying Discourses’ in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 2000*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 2000, pp. 191–204. Grøn shows: ‘The synthesis ... is a designation for the finitude of the human being. To be composed or distended in such a manner is identical with being finite’, p. 194. However, Grøn does not refer to the problem of the intellectual intuition.

ing would only be possible if humans were capable of what Kant calls 'intellectual intuition'. An absolute awareness of being would only be possible if the human being was infinite, endowed with an intellectual intuition by which the intuition of objects is at the same time a creation of them. But Kierkegaard, no less than Kant, makes it clear that intuitions can be created only by a *divine* mind, which he (like Kant) naturally associates with God. In the *Postscript* Kierkegaard claims: 'God does not think, he creates; God does not exist [*existere*], he is eternal. A human being thinks and exists, and existence [*Existents*] separates thinking and being, holds them apart from each other in succession' (VII 287 / SKS 7, 303). God's thinking and being are not separate since he creates by his peculiar kind of 'thinking'. Kierkegaard (as well as Kant) is more than reserved about any more detailed or specific account of how such creation or divine intuition may express itself. But he leaves no doubt that human beings' thinking cannot by an act of creation provide being or actuality as it is in itself. Kant and Kierkegaard are both conscious of the fact that the creation of intuitions is impossible for us since as radically finite beings we do not have any access to infinity understood as the original act of the creation of being. Corresponding to this impossibility (of an absolute understanding of being) is the claim that it is impossible to understand how objects affect us independent of space and time, since such an understanding would, according to Kant, be tantamount to creating the object. Consequently it is even impossible to introspect one's inner state as it is in itself. Empirical consciousness or the inner sense 'by means of which the mind intuits itself or its inner state, yields indeed no intuition of the soul itself as an object' (A23 / B37; cf. A33 / B49). Even insofar as we introspect our consciousness or intuit ourselves, it is impossible to reach out for that which we really are or for what our mind really is in itself. Insofar as we think, it is impossible to 'agree' with our self-intuition in the sense that something in or of our self is true *absolutely*. On the whole, human finiteness makes understandable an 'absolute difference between God and a human being' (VII 182 / SKS 7, 199) and this is what Kierkegaard again and again emphasises. This, of course, means that both Kant and Kierkegaard therefore reject the claim that human beings are capable of establishing the corresponding unity between understanding and objects characteristic of intellectual intuition. The understanding is not originally unified with objects in the sense that it creates (and *thereby* intuits) them. Correspondingly, such truth is not available for us as human beings.

We have seen that the finiteness of our understanding prevents us from attaining an absolute truth of things as they are in themselves. This just corresponds to the very fact that we have to represent the object in empirical consciousness as being based upon its condition of time. The understanding simply prevents an absolute truth on account of its very finiteness or its incapacity to intuit its object intellectually. Its finiteness shows itself as its conceptuality or its formal aspect of being-valid-for-many. Only insofar as we grasp intuitions within the paradigm of conceptuality is it possible to understand them, but we never understand them absolutely. The conceptuality of the understanding can be understood as its particular kind of ideality, but the relation of ideality and reality in empirical consciousness does not allow us to get hold of the object absolutely – it is only grasped within the ideal sphere of conceptuality.

Against this background Kierkegaard refers to consciousness as a contradiction: ‘Immediacy is reality; language is ideality; consciousness is contradiction [*Modsigelse*]. The moment I make a statement about reality, contradiction is present, for what I say is ideality’ (IV B1 146). For a divine understanding such a contradiction could not possibly emerge. But how can *we* solve this contradiction, which, according to Kierkegaard generally, ‘is always the expression of a task’ (IV 301 / *SKS* 4, 335)? How can we get hold of a unity or truth, which is not contradictory or does not have doubt at its very core? Insofar as this kind of contradiction stems from the very finiteness of the understanding, which Kant and Kierkegaard both presuppose, it can *never* be solved absolutely. Indeed both Kant and Kierkegaard reject the claim that an absolute knowledge of reality is possible for us. The finiteness of the understanding cannot possibly be transcended.

However, the contradiction in our consciousness may be capable of being transcended relatively. As we have seen in (1.1), the understanding in its merely logical application in the sense of *formal* logic (i.e. in abstraction from its crucial transcendental employment as Kant sees it) prevents truth insofar as its conditions are not sufficient to distinguish between real knowledge of objects and merely inventing objects. In this sense the understanding (so far we have only been dealing with its formal aspect) is incapable of providing a positive criterion of truth, that is, is incapable of an *a priori* unification which provides a necessary condition of objects (empirical being). This insufficiency of the understanding prevents us from attaining truth. Correspondingly, it does imply doubt since no relation to reality can

be based upon *a priori* knowledge if the understanding involves principles of formal logic only.⁴⁹

It is important to distinguish doubt as a consequence of this indifference of the understanding in virtue of its merely logical employment and doubt as a consequence of the fact that it is the understanding *at all* which relates to reality by means of judgements – and not a divine or intuitive understanding. Doubt emerges in the latter case because we relate to something real by means of something ideal, that is, relate to reality within the paradigm of ideality *at all*. It emerges because of a fundamental ‘disunity’ of the understanding and objects *per se*, a disunity which corresponds to the fact that our finite understanding does not create objects with respect to their existence. Kierkegaard and Kant agree that this basic disunity can never be overcome. However, as we will see in the next chapter (2.2), Kant’s epistemology is an attempt to justify an endowment of the rules of the understanding with a positive criterion of truth and thereby tries to overcome the indifference of the understanding in its logical employment. By doing so, Kant tries to overcome the seeming contradiction of ideality and reality, not the finiteness of the understanding or of ideality, and hence tries to overcome the corresponding scepticism. With regard to theoretical knowledge, the contradiction between ideality and reality in consciousness cannot even be transcended relatively according to Kierkegaard. Unlike Kierkegaard, Kant considers this to be possible. It is here where we will discern a fundamental difference between Kant and Kierkegaard.

⁴⁹ Of course, Kant does not think that this is finally the case. As we will see in the next chapter, he is convinced that we can have synthetic knowledge *a priori* of reality.

Chapter 2

Kierkegaard's Explicit and Implicit Critiques of Kant's Theory of Knowledge

We have seen that it is essential that sensibility and understanding (the two bases of our faculty of knowledge) can arrive at *knowledge* only if they are *unified with* or *related to* each other by means of rules: 'These two powers or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their *union* can knowledge arise' (A51 / B75). Knowledge can only arise if 'the object is thought *in relation* to that given representation (A50 / B74). Truth must be established by and through a unification or relation between understanding and sensibility that provides a positive and *a priori* criterion of truth. How is such a unification of two distinct and separate bases possible? Or, as Kant often puts it, how is an *a priori* relation or application of the understanding to the object possible? (cf. A55 / B79) This is the core question of the *Transcendental Logic* of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. If Kant succeeds in showing that such a relation or application is possible and necessary *a priori*, then indeed he has shown that objective knowledge is possible and indeed has secured the foundations of knowledge. Is there a special sense in which an *a priori* unity between our thinking and (intuited) objects becomes possible? Is it possible to overcome the indifference of the understanding? With this question, the question of the possibility of objective truth arises, because if the two bases of our faculty of knowledge can be related or unified with each other in an *a priori* way, then at least in one respect they agree with one another. Such a fundamental relation between our understanding and given objects can and must be understood as an *agreement* between both entities whereby they *correspond* with each other (A58 / B82). Hence the possibility and impossibility of such a relation directly concerns the possibility and impossibility of objective *truth* – if one accepts the traditional theory of truth as correspondence of *res* and *intellectus* as both Kant (first of all) and Kierkegaard do. Hence the question of an *a priori* relation or unity between

thinking and objects at the same time concerns the question of whether we can arrive at truth thus defined within the realm of theoretical knowledge. If an *a priori* relation cannot be justified, then the undetermined objects we receive cannot thus be determined and objective experience is impossible correspondingly.

The above scenario leads to one other seemingly paradoxical result which has already been emphasised at the end of the last chapter. In order to arrive at 'proper' situatedness or truth, an *a priori* relation between thinking and sensibility is necessary according to Kant. But, whatever this relation may consist in, the very fact that we have to relate these two different entities *at all* arises from our very *finiteness*, that is, it arises from the radical limitedness of the two bases of our mind. We have to receive objects, we need to be affected passively by them. Insofar as they are the cause of our being affected, objects (things as they are in themselves) remain necessarily hidden: our understanding is not intuitive and (the content of) our sensibility is not infinitely 'understandable'. We cannot create these objects at the same time as we intuit them. If we could, we would understand them in themselves. Instead, our understanding has to 'await' intuitions and the very finite nature of our understanding prevents it from knowing the objects *absolutely*. As soon as and insofar as we as finite human beings relate to objects received through *our* sensibility, we make it impossible to get to know reality as it really is in itself. Hence, let me reiterate, even if the *a priori* relation or unity between our understanding and our sensibility can be justified and established, this very finite relation prevents us from arriving at truth *absolutely*. Such an *a priori* relation is therefore the precondition of truth – understood in a relative and finite way – and at the same time the precondition of the impossibility of truth, understood in an absolute and infinite way. It makes objective truth possible. But such truth is only valid *for us as finite human beings*. Since we cannot arrive at truth in an absolute and infinite way the very finiteness of our relation leaves us necessarily in doubt about the way in which reality is in itself.⁵⁰ With this background we can now turn to a crucial passage in the *Postscript* where Kierkegaard criticises Kant's theory of knowledge.

⁵⁰ 'Scepticism of idealism' (VII 283 / SKS 7, 300) is the term Kierkegaard uses to characterise this situation.

2.1 Kierkegaard's Explicit Critique of the Relation Between Actuality and Thinking

In the *Postscript* Kierkegaard remarks:

Instead of admitting that idealism is in the right – but, please note, in such a way that one would reject the whole question about actuality [*Virkelighed*] (about a self-withholding *an sich*) in relation to thinking as a temptation, which like all other temptations cannot possibly be cancelled by surrendering to it – instead of putting a stop to Kant's deviation, which brought actuality into relation to thinking, instead of referring actuality to the ethical, Hegel certainly went further, inasmuch as he became fantastical and overcame the scepticism of idealism by means of pure thinking, which is a hypothesis and, although it does not proclaim itself as such, is fantastical (VII 282 f. / *SKS* 7, 299).

In the following, I will first of all discuss three possible ways of understanding this passage (2.1.1–2.1.3) and will show that, in each of them, Kierkegaard's reading of Kant is *not* justified when he accuses him of relating actuality (conceived of as a *thing in itself*) to thinking. In the fourth and main point (2.2) I will show, however, that there is nevertheless a crucial difference between Kant's and Kierkegaard's epistemology. In the fifth point (2.3) I will briefly allude to the fact that the difference between Kierkegaard's and Hegel's conception is even more thoroughgoing than that between Kierkegaard and Kant.

2.1.1 The Relation Between Actuality and Thinking in Terms of Intellectual Intuition

One possible way of conceiving of the relation between thinking and actuality would be the assumption that the understanding is capable of creating the object and hence capable of 'understanding' the *an sich* or the (absolute) actuality of it. The understanding would then be immediately unified with the object in its 'coming forth'. As we have seen in the last chapter, Kant clearly disputes such a possibility for us, as does Kierkegaard. Both Kant and Kierkegaard are (and this has to be emphasised) strongly convinced that human beings are not capable of being infinite in this way. Objects are given to us by means of receiving them through intuition; we cannot create them and therefore we are radically finite creatures. Therefore, in this respect, Kierkegaard's accusation would not really make sense.

2.1.2 *The Relation Between Actuality and Thinking in Terms of the Invention of Objects*

There is yet another way in which Kierkegaard does not, after all, disagree with Kant in respect of the relation between thinking and an *an sich* actuality. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant emphasises that although we do not have any *knowledge* of things in themselves since we do not have a divine intellect, we are capable of *thinking* noumena (= *inventing* objects)⁵¹. To think noumena or to invent *things in themselves* is, of course different from thinking as an act of *creating* noumena (intellectual intuition). In the latter case objects are created with respect to their existence. This, however, is impossible. In the former case we wrongly pretend and deceive ourselves in assuming that an invention of objects qua thinking corresponds to the reality of these objects. Hence we in some sense pretend that we are capable of an intellectual intuition. But as an independent faculty of our faculty of knowledge, our understanding is indeed capable of inventing objects. And, insofar as the corresponding judgements are not logically self-contradictory, it is possible that 'something real' corresponds to them. However, as regarded in this way, the understanding is incapable of providing such criteria, which must be seen as a necessary condition of the object of our experience.⁵² Hence it is powerless to provide a condition that would be capable of distinguishing between objects of experience and invented objects. As a result, the corresponding unity that lies at the basis of objects which are invented by the understanding is (necessarily) deceptive – if one accepts that truth must necessarily imply a criterion of distinguishing between objects as thought and objects as received. We deceive ourselves by assuming that the results of our thinking have reality in one way or the other.

⁵¹ Cf. footnote 40. The mere thinking or invention of an object, of course, has to be sharply distinguished from the knowledge of an object. However, Kant does refer to the former especially with regard to 'the doctrine of the noumenon in the negative sense, that is, of things which the understanding must think without this reference to our mode of intuition, therefore not merely of appearances but as things in themselves' (B307). More generally, he refers to it time and again in the Chapter on Phaenomena and Noumena of the *Critique* (A 235 ff. / B294 ff.). However, it seems unlikely that Kierkegaard was aware of these subtleties of Kant's epistemology.

⁵² Of course, even in its transcendental employment the understanding is incapable of providing the object of experience in respect of its existence. It can only provide conditions of the *possibility* of experience of objects.

Therefore time and again Kant warns against bringing thinking into relation with the way reality is in itself. Every attempt to get access to an '*an sich*' in this way is an illusion. Kierkegaard does not say that *in this sense* it is not possible to think *things in themselves*. Indeed it is a 'temptation' to do so and Kierkegaard is implicitly quite conscious of this fact when he says that the 'only *an sich* that cannot be thought is existing' (VII 283 / SKS 7, 300). Therefore he agrees with Kant that for us finite human beings such a relation between thinking and actuality can only be deceptive and is trapped in dialectical illusion.⁵³ Since there is no disagreement between Kierkegaard and Kant with respect to the possibility and status of an invention of objects, the passage in the *Postscript* would not really make sense if understood correspondingly.

2.1.3 *The Relation Between Actuality and Thinking in Terms of Things in Themselves as the Cause of Sense-Affection*

Why is Kierkegaard nevertheless convinced that Kant's epistemology takes a wrong turn by relating thinking with actuality as it is in itself? Why does Kierkegaard think that Kant's epistemology deviates from the principle that we cannot relate thinking and *an sich* actuality? Why, in other words, does he think that Kant is guilty of relating thinking with an *an sich* actuality? In order to understand this Kierkegaardian claim and to reach a view on it, we need to examine Kant's theory of knowledge further. So far we have only started to develop the Kantian conviction that *a priori* knowledge or truth can only emerge if the rules of the understanding and sensibility can and must be related to or unified with each other in an *a priori* way. A justified *a priori* relation or unity between the two roots of the mind would imply an *a priori* knowledge, which precedes any instance of empirical knowledge or experience. Such

⁵³ Dialectical illusion is based upon thinking that does not take into account that it should always be related to experience. Thinking is tempted to think *things in themselves* (in the sense of merely inventing objects) and in the Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant discusses three main illusions, those of 'soul', 'world', and 'God' and shows that they are not possible objects of knowledge. Kierkegaard's discussion of these concepts is clearly in accordance with Kant and does take into account that they do not belong to the theoretical sphere of our understanding, but to its practical dimension.

knowledge would concern the *origin* of knowledge. Such an origin (= the transcendental *content* of knowledge; cf. B77) is at the same time a positive criterion of truth and, finally, results in true *a priori* propositions about the experience of reality. It precedes any actual relation between thinking and sense perception in empirical consciousness and makes it objective.

Now there is one important characteristic in the Kantian answer to the question of how to conceive of the unification of understanding and sensibility which has already been mentioned, but which is so crucial that we need to underline it further since it gives us the key to understanding Kierkegaard's critique of Kant. In the transcendental deduction Kant claims: 'But in the above proof [the or a proof of the Transcendental Deduction] there is one feature from which I could not abstract, the feature, namely, that the manifold to be intuited must be given *prior* to the synthesis of understanding, and *independently* of it. How this takes place remains here undetermined' (B145). As we have seen, Kant attempts to relate understanding and intuitions by establishing a kind of transcendental truth or transcendental content of knowledge. He does not thereby understand intuitions in an absolute way (as a *thing in itself*), but in a relative way, e. g., as sense perceptions received through space and time. However, the difference between intuitions perceived by sense perception and intuitions in themselves – what Kierkegaard calls 'actuality' in the crucial passage at the beginning of this chapter – is *not absolute*. Indeed it is the *things in themselves*, it is the independent actuality which does affect our sense perception. Kant claims, expressed in Kierkegaard's terminology, that 'a self-withholding *an sich*' (VII 282 / SKS 7, 299) is responsible for our being affected, but he insists that we don't know *how* this affection takes place in us. If we knew this 'how', we would have real access to an actuality in itself.

For Kierkegaard a relation between thinking and an independent reality is not sufficiently excluded by this account (if we read the passage from the *Postscript* in this way). Thinking just cannot be related to reality in the way Kant claims according to Kierkegaard. In relation to the *existence* of the object ('the that'), for Kant *things in themselves* are the very same as things for us in time and space. It is these very same objects which are capable of being organised by the understanding, according to Kant. But, according to Kierkegaard, Kant doesn't separate *things in themselves* from things we perceive in a radical enough fashion, since the very same *things in themselves* both affect us and are represented by us through space and time. It is probably this

account, which is at the core of Kant's theory of knowledge, about which Kierkegaard is most suspicious.⁵⁴

Can we therefore say with Kierkegaard that the transcendental analytic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, although it seriously and explicitly understands the relation between 'a self-withholding *an sich*' and thinking as a temptation, nevertheless gives way to this temptation in a certain sense? Does it give way to the temptation to establish a relation between the categories of thought and a self-withholding *an sich*? I do not think that the Kierkegaardian criticism is justified. As we discovered in the first chapter, Kierkegaard and Kant both take for granted that there are two different bases of theoretical knowledge (both are dualists), which cannot resemble one another – understanding and sensibility. Furthermore, Kant and Kierkegaard are at pains to stress that the understanding cannot be related to *things in themselves* and hence is not intuitive. To say that the source of our affection is not based in the *things in themselves* would imply that they are not radically different from the way in which we consciously make judgments about 'them'. Hence it would mean giving up the view that there are radically different bases of knowledge. To assert with Kant (a) that we are affected by *things in themselves* while admitting (b) that we do not know *how* this affection takes place is a possible solution, copes both with dualism and the disallowing of an intellectual intuition. But I do not know how Kierkegaard can coherently take a dualist position, condemning intellectual intuition, without accepting that *things in themselves* affect us and that it is finally the data of this affection that will somehow be related to the understanding. On the contrary, I think that Kierkegaard's position in this respect is much closer to Kant's than the Dane acknowledges or is aware of.

2.2 Kierkegaard's Implicit Critique: *The Difference Between Kant's and Kierkegaard's Epistemologies*

Now that we have seen that Kierkegaard's *explicit* critique of Kant's epistemology is not valid I will show that there is nevertheless a crucial *implicit* difference in their conceptions. Kant claims in the *Cri-*

⁵⁴ Rolf-Peter Horstmann definitively demonstrates that the criticism of this conception, which is at the core of Kant's theory of knowledge, goes back to Jacobi and strongly influenced all the main representatives of German Idealism, namely Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. See his *Grenzen der Vernunft*, Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum Verlag 1995, pp. 57 ff., 83 ff. and 91 ff.

tique of Pure Reason that 'theoretical knowledge may be defined as knowledge of what is' (B661). Such knowledge qua thinking can, as we have repeatedly seen, first of all refer to an invented object. Our understanding can invent objects or think noumena which do not necessarily correspond to reality. Hence the status of this kind of knowledge is 'speculative' (B662). Secondly, theoretical knowledge can refer to a given object in space and time. In this case the status of such knowledge is not speculative, but has the status of 'knowledge of nature' (B662f.). There is no doubt that for Kierkegaard, theoretical knowledge generally concerns knowledge of what is. Such knowledge he calls 'objective reflection'. Kierkegaard writes: 'When the question about truth is asked objectively, truth is reflected upon objectively as an object to which the knower relates himself. What is reflected upon is not the relation, but that what he relates himself to is the truth, the true' (VII 166 / SKS 7, 182). Correspondingly, 'the emphasis is on what is said' (VII 169 / SKS 7, 185). The determinations of 'what is' are also determinations of thinking for Kierkegaard: 'Objectively, the question is only about categories of thought ...' (VII 169 / SKS 7, 186). What we think or the object of thinking can vary. We have already seen that speculative knowledge in the way Kant uses the term⁵⁵ is possible according to Kierkegaard: 'The only *an sich* that cannot be thought is existing' (VII 283 / SKS 7, 300). Of course, we can think whatever we would like to as long as it does not violate the understanding's uppermost principle, the principle of contradiction. However, as we have seen time and again, regarded in this way, the principle of contradiction is indifferent or insufficient to knowledge of nature, that is, objects in space and time or what Kierkegaard also calls 'historical knowledge' (VII 161 / SKS 7, 177). In the following I will show that it is precisely in respect of the *status* of historical knowledge or knowledge of nature where Kant and Kierkegaard disagree.

Let us have a closer look at the 'Transcendental Logic' of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Its main purpose is to specify those conditions of the understanding which make objective truth possible since the negative conditions of general logic are not sufficient to distinguish between truth and deception. How can we specify thinking and its corresponding rules in such a way that it can justifiably be applied to objects, represented in empirical consciousness? Kant's answer is in-

⁵⁵ Such speculation is different from the kind of speculation against which Kierkegaard polemicalises in the *Postscript* and which involves a mediation between the subject and the object. See below.

deed very complicated. It involves the analyses of the so-called Transcendental Deduction of the understanding, its Schematism, and, finally, its System of all Principles. These chapters of the *Critique* specify the conditions of the understanding in a more and more detailed way. Accordingly, Kant speaks of 'a system ... of the epigenesis of pure reason' (B167). Of course, it is not possible here to discuss any of the corresponding chapters in a thorough way. Let us, however, have a quick look at the most fundamental⁵⁶ analysis of the understanding, namely its transcendental deduction. Very roughly, it will turn out in this chapter of the *Critique* that the understanding has to be specified in such a way that it fulfils at least the condition of the transcendental apperception. The transcendental apperception (standing in a necessary connection to the so-called transcendental imagination) is the radical capacity of the mind and guarantees or finally makes possible the unity of empirical consciousness, that is, an *a priori* agreement of thinking with all possible objects we receive (in time):

Consciousness of self according to the determination of our state in inner perception is merely empirical, and always changing. No fixed and abiding self can present itself in this flux of inner appearances. Such consciousness is usually named *inner sense* or *empirical apperception*. ... There can be in us no modes of knowledge, nor connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with one another, without that unity of consciousness, which precedes all data of intuitions, and by relation to which representation of objects is alone possible. This pure original unchangeable consciousness I shall name *transcendental apperception* (A107).

If the logical forms of judgement are grounded and specified in this way and are additionally specified as (schematized) categories it is possible that 'they' can be applied to reality, so that the corresponding judgements are capable of being understood as objectively true according to Kant. If so, these conditions of the understanding (together with their specifications as determinations of time as discussed in the Schematism and the System of all Principles) can be called *positive*, or are positive conditions of the agreement between understanding and the corresponding object. These positive subjective conditions of our

⁵⁶ The transcendental deduction provides the most fundamental analysis because it is here where Kant addresses the question whether we have any reason *at all* to suppose that our understanding relates to our intuitions. A lot of the interpreters of the analytic tradition have simply not made enough effort to understand the *Critique* in order to realise this, since they usually consider the System of all Principles to be fundamental and understand the *Critique* one-sidedly as a 'theory of experience'. Martin Heidegger, who, on the contrary, reads the *Critique* as providing the fundament of metaphysics is equally wrong since he tries to ground the Deduction in the Schematism.

understanding can be said to relate the thinking subject and the given object or reality. Hence they constitute something which can be called transcendental truth. Transcendental truth concerns those conditions of the thinking subject which are necessary for any kind of objective reality in empirical consciousness. Kant therefore aims at a conceptualised system of existence which gives positive and necessary conditions of the understanding that make possible an *objective* relation between ideality and reality in empirical consciousness. The framework which, so to speak, 'defines' the transcendental content or the transcendental truth makes objectively true statements possible. The question of truth arises with the application of judgements (thinking) to reality. However, this application *per se* is insufficient to guarantee that the statement will be objectively true or false. It is the *a priori* content of the understanding which entails the possibility of such objectivity. Hence the conditions of the understanding are changed and specified in such a way that doubt with regard to the capacities of our finite knowledge becomes impossible. From here we can understand once again why Kant's theory of knowledge was broadly directed against scepticism.

Let us briefly illustrate this by means of the category of *causality*. Kant claims that 'this concept makes the strict demand that something, A, should be such that something else, B, follows from it *necessarily and in accordance with an absolutely universal rule*' (B124). In other words: a particular effect in nature follows in every case without exception from its cause. The connection between A and B is not just a matter of probability and it is not just *a posteriori* that we can make this connection. On the contrary, it is something that we know *a priori* before we perceive A or B. Hence the category of causality has objective validity, it is valid in respect of the objects we intuit through sense-perception. The unity or rule which this category involves has a necessary application to reality.

It is Kant's explicit aim to establish a positive *a priori* content of knowledge rooted in pure thinking. As we will see, it is just such a possibility of a pure relation between the understanding and empirical being to which Kierkegaard objects. For Kierkegaard implicitly rejects the claim that any *a priori* unity or agreement between thinking and empirical being is possible, or the claim that any such connection between the subject as thinking and its object can be made. Kierkegaard's misconceived critique of a relation between thinking and an *an sich* actuality as discussed in the previous sections should hence rather be understood as the rejection of the position which relates thinking to received objects in empirical consciousness in such a way

that objective knowledge emerges. Kierkegaard rejects the idea that actuality is a product of intellectual forming or is *domesticated*⁵⁷ by the understanding. This corresponds to his critique of endowing thought with the capacity to objectify actuality or to objectify empirical consciousness, or, expressed differently, his critique of an objective system of existence.

In the *Postscript* Kierkegaard makes it plain that he rejects the idea of any kind of *a priori* relation in terms of establishing positive criteria of knowledge of nature such as is necessary for Kant's project of defeating scepticism. An *a priori* relation between thinking and (empirical) being rooted in transcendental consciousness construes a unity between the subject and the object. But such a unity is not or cannot legitimately be possible according to Kierkegaard: 'The systematic idea is subject-object, is the unity of thinking and being' (VII 101 / SKS 7, 118). Such a system of existence is invalid as the Dane sees it. We cannot arrive at any systematic *a priori* account of how we represent empirical reality in existence. We cannot objectify existence in this way.

The construal of an *a priori* unity (being rooted in transcendental consciousness) involves what the *Postscript* calls a *mediation* of the subject to the object. Thereby we move so to speak from the subject to the object. Mediation 'has movement as its presupposition' (VII 165 / SKS 7, 181). However, Kierkegaard is at pains to ensure that movement not be held to be a feature of the understanding or of logic: 'It is indeed curious to make movement the basis in a sphere in which movement is inconceivable or to have movement explain logic, whereas logic cannot explain movement' (VII 89 / SKS 7, 106).

As we have seen, the *a priori* unification of the understanding with sensibility involves the establishment of a transcendental *content*. According to Kierkegaard, any such content is impossible: 'The logical system must not be a mystification, a ventriloquism, in which the content of existence emerges cunningly and surreptitiously ...' (VII 90 / SKS 7, 107). For Kierkegaard, I think, Kantian epistemology is guilty of just such a 'mystification'. It is the very origin of fantastic thinking and the very origin of a dangerous and even evil way of existence since it prevents human beings from their essential tasks in life, it prevents human beings from the *only* real truthful existence, which is essentially determined within the sphere of practical (moral/religious/Christian) determinations. If actuality is related to the practical only, it is open-ended and undomesticatable in virtue of the understanding.

⁵⁷ I owe this pertinent expression to Alastair Hannay.

According to Kierkegaard, if 'being' is understood as 'empirical being' truth can only be understood as an 'approximating' (VII 157 / SKS 7, 174). This follows from the fact that existence is permeated by time and has no access to any capacity – like Kant's categories and transcendental apperception – from which an objective system of existence, a mediation or an *a priori* content would be possible. Kierkegaard can therefore be said to be an empiricist in this respect. Objective reflection⁵⁸ is possible, according to him, but such reflection is never capable of gaining any objective results in the Kantian sense. For Kierkegaard, knowledge of nature or historical knowledge, understood as having object-related validity for every human being as such, is impossible.

In the end the difference between Kant's and Kierkegaard's conception of truth (and hence of an *a priori* unity in respect of theoretical knowledge) can be described in a very general way with the help of two passages of text. When Kant looks back at what he had gained from all the main parts of the Transcendental Logic in the *Critique of Pure Reason* he summarises his results as follows:

We have now not merely explored the territory of pure understanding, and carefully surveyed every part of it, but have also measured its extent, and assigned to everything in it its rightful place. This domain is an island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits. It is the land of truth – enchanting name! – surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion, where many a swiftly melting iceberg give the deceptive appearance of farther shores, deluding the adventurous seafarer ever anew with empty hopes, and engaging him in enterprises which he can never abandon and yet is unable to carry to completion (A235 f.).

Kierkegaard seems to be informed by this passage. Unlike Kant however, he rejects any kind of truth – even though surrounded by untruth – which could seem to be the result or outcome of Kant's theoretical philosophy. For Kierkegaard the positive truth at which Kant arrives is itself an illusion or a 'phantom' (VII 200 / SKS 7, 217), essentially responsible for the death of the human being's authentic spirit or his eternal happiness:

[There] was a wisdom that wanted to fly past faith, that on the other side of faith there was a wide range like the blue mountains, a specious continent, which to the mortal eye looked like a certainty greater than that of faith, but the believer feared this *mirage* as the skipper fears a similar mirage at sea, feared that it was a sham eternity in which a

⁵⁸ I understand this term in the sense in which Kierkegaard uses it in the *Postscript*. This kind of reflection does not involve an *a priori* mediation between the subject and the object that Kierkegaard conceives of as being unjustifiable.

mortal cannot live, but in which, if he steadily stares into it, he will lose his faith (VII 200 / *SKS* 7, 216, italics mine).

Kant speaks of the 'land of truth', because he claims to have revealed the necessary *a priori* relations which fundamentally give unity to thinking and actuality (empirical being). He claims to have demonstrated that pure thinking can and indeed must be applied to our intuitions and he correspondingly claims to have shown that we must presuppose synthetic judgements *a priori* in order to have a fully fledged unitary experience. From the analysis above it follows that from Kierkegaard's perspective this land of truth can only be a 'specious continent', because its certainty is only an illusion or has illusory character.

2.3 Hegel's Straightforward Deviation from Kierkegaard

Finally in this section I want at least to allude to the fact that there is an even more fundamental gap between Kierkegaard's and Hegel's account than between Kierkegaard's and Kant's conception. As we have seen, Kant's establishment of a positive content of knowledge was directed against scepticism. For the sceptic, there is no such content and accordingly there is no possibility of establishing *a priori* unity or agreement between thinking and sensibility. However, it is clear that Kant does not rule out scepticism absolutely since transcendental truth has no validity in respect of things as they are in themselves. Absolute truth is only possible for God. Now, it was a (if not *the*) concern of German Idealism to get hold of a knowledge of *things in themselves*. Against this background we can say that Kant's 'deviation' is partly a deviation in Kierkegaard's eyes because in one way or another it inspired Hegel to try to think *things in themselves* or to have an absolute knowledge about them.⁵⁹ As a result of this Hegel 'became fantastical' and throughout the *Postscript* Kierkegaard attacks all the consequences of such a way of thinking which proceeds *sub specie aeterni*, i. e., the kind of thinking which aims at an understand-

⁵⁹ In the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* Hegel writes characteristically: '[Das] wesentliche aber ist, dies für die ganze Untersuchung festzuhalten, dass diese beiden Momente, Begriff und Gegenstand, Für-ein-Anderes- und An-sich-selbst-Sein, in das Wissen, das wir untersuchen, selbst fallen und hiermit wir nicht nötig haben, Massstäbe mitzubringen und unsere Einfälle und Gedanken bei der Untersuchung zu applizieren; dadurch, dass wir diese weglassen, erreichen wir es, die Sache, wie sie *an* und *für sich* selbst ist, zu betrachten', p. 77.

ing of an *an sich*. One could say that Fichte as well as Schelling are peculiar examples of fantastical thinking. In one way or the other, all the main representatives of German Idealism wanted to overcome the scepticism that they thought had not been sufficiently overcome by Kant – precisely because he was convinced that we never know about the way reality is in itself. They considered it to be a deficiency of Kant's theoretical philosophy that he did not get rid of scepticism absolutely, but only relatively in respect of the radical finiteness or limitations of human beings.⁶⁰ Kierkegaard shares with the German Idealists the feeling that *scepticism* still requires a response, which (from their point of view) has not been absolutely excluded by Kant. However, Kierkegaard completely rejects the way in which these Idealists, above all Hegel, responded to Kant.⁶¹ He rejects any relation between *thinking* and *things in themselves*: 'To reply to Kant within the fantastical Schattenspiel of pure thinking is precisely not to reply to him' (VII 283 / SKS 7, 300). Hegel does not really reply to Kant, because he does not *really* take into account the situation that human beings are finite creatures who are not capable of thinking *sub specie aeterni*. For Kierkegaard, we cannot arrive at actuality as it is in itself through finite thinking. And the very finiteness of thinking cannot be transcended 'by being thought through' (VII 283 / SKS 7, 300) as Hegel tried to do. In Kierkegaard's eyes such an attempt is circular, because *scepticism* is the result of the kind of finite thinking of which, as finite human beings, we are capable, and we cannot get rid of finite thinking by means of (pure) finite thinking itself. But, according to Kierkegaard, the result of such an attempt again leads into *scepticism*, which is no longer explicit, but hidden: 'The most dangerous scepticism is always that which least appears as such, but the idea that pure thinking is supposed to be the positive truth for an existing person is scepticism, because this positively is chimerical' (VII 266). Of course, this

⁶⁰ Compare here the analysis in the best book on the problem of scepticism in German Idealism: Rolf-Peter Horstmann *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, pp. 58 ff., 107 ff., 130 ff.

⁶¹ We have seen above that it is the transcendental apperception which mediates subject and objects and which is finally responsible for an *a priori* unity of the self. Kierkegaard rejects such a possibility. Hegel, on the contrary, considered transcendental apperception to be the major contribution of Kant's theoretical philosophy. In his *Wissenschaft der Logik II*, he says: 'Es gehört zu den tiefsten und richtigsten Einsichten, die sich in der Kritik der Vernunft finden, dass die Einheit, die das Wesen des Begriffs ausmacht, als die ursprünglich-synthetische Einheit der Apperzeption, als Einheit des 'Ich denke' oder des Selbstbewusstseins erkannt wird', Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1993, p. 254.

passage can just as well be understood as directed at Kant. However, it is also clear that the degree of deception must be even more consolidated by Hegel's attempt to go further in the direction of this fantastical kind of investigation which attempts to know *things in themselves*. That which Hegel and his idealist predecessors believed to preserve the dignity of their way of thinking – the engagement with the conditions of the possibility of objective thinking in whatever way each of them understood this term⁶² – distracts human existence even more from itself. Thereby human existence assumes that it knows *things in themselves*, but in reality it surrenders to an ever more and complete deception.

Given Kierkegaard's claim that mediation between the subject and the object is impossible and his rejection of any *a priori* unity or truth upon which empirical consciousness may be based, where are we? Let Kant himself spell out the consequence when he reasons about what existence would be like if the final source of mediation, the transcendental apperception, was not a necessary presupposition of empirical consciousness: 'I should have as many coloured and diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious to myself' (B134). 'Correspondingly [c]onsciousness of the self according to the determinations of our state in inner perception is merely empirical, and always changing. No fixed and abiding self can present itself in this flux of inner appearances' (A107).

The rejection, then, of the view that there is a unity between subject and object qua thinking leaves existence as precisely that which it was pronounced to be in the first chapter – as the absolute separation between thinking and being. Existence is crucially determined – and dis-unified – by time. Let us now follow Kierkegaard's (Kantian) path out of this dilemma.

⁶² Thereby they can be said to be trying to preserve the Kantian 'direction' of the Copernican Revolution. Kierkegaard may have established (or wanted to establish) a new kind of 'Copernican Revolution' by analysing those ways in which *existence* is possible. In this respect Paul Ricoeur has a number of interesting points. See his 'Philosophieren nach Kierkegaard' in *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, ed. by Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1979, pp. 587 ff.

Chapter 3

Double-Mindedness or the Failure of an Orientation of the Will

So far we have seen that according to Kierkegaard it is *thinking* that cannot provide a ‘positive’ *a priori* basis of knowledge of nature. No rules could be established that make an objective experience possible. As we will see now, the rules or principles that constitute ‘double-mindedness’ correspond to the failure of *willing* authentically. Willing belongs to the realm of the practical. Practical knowledge, as construed by Kant, generally denotes ‘what ought to be’ (B661). To be a *moral* agent, which as we will see in the next chapter gives us a true point of orientation, involves the use of an unconditionally good will and the performance of a corresponding action. Attitudes of this sort denote the realm of the practical in the *strict* sense.⁶³ In a *broad*er sense the realm of the practical concerns *any* kind of will and its corresponding action. According to this broader construal of the practical ‘the will is nothing but practical reason’ (G 412). Practical reason shows itself by ‘the power to act according to [one’s] representation of laws, i. e., according to principles’ (G 412). In other words: insofar as a human being’s *will* is determined by principles, she is determined practically.

Practical knowledge generally denotes what Kierkegaard calls subjective reflection: ‘*When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual’s relation is reflected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth...*’ (VII 166 / SKS 7, 182). Kierkegaard clearly conceives of the individual’s (self-) relation

⁶³ Despite the fact that for Kant (unlike Kierkegaard) a moderate kind of truth or unity is possible in respect of theoretical knowledge, it is clear that it is far from being sufficient in respect of practical knowledge in the strict sense. Furthermore, it is also obvious that such practical knowledge has priority over theoretical knowledge for Kant – a view which Kierkegaard certainly shares. In this connection compare the brilliant work on this problem by William Dayton Peck *On Autonomy: The Primacy of the Subject in Kant and Kierkegaard*, unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Yale University 1974.

as being a determination of the will (XI 128). Since there is also no doubt that the will aims at what there should be, we can conclude that insofar as we reflect subjectively, we reflect upon the individual's will. This holds true both of the will as being double-minded and of the authentic will.⁶⁴

In this chapter I focus on non-moral willing and its corresponding principles or on that kind of 'how' which is not in truth according to Kierkegaard. I investigate Kierkegaard's understanding of 'double-mindedness' in *An Occasional Discourse* (more commonly referred to as *Purity of Heart*) and its relation to Kant's conception of non-moral conduct as presented in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. The analysis of double-mindedness will provide us with the fundamental features characteristic of the so-called *aesthetic* stage of Kierkegaard's theory of existential stages.⁶⁵ Double-mindedness denotes what must be understood as a failure of our moral/religious commitment which we will examine in greater detail in later chapters. I claim that the *structure* of this failure is one and the same in Kant and Kierkegaard insofar as we are exposed to a moral situation. This does not mean that dealing with one of the thinkers absolves us from dealing with the other. Rather, *each* sheds light on different aspects of one and the same phenomenon. Together they can be seen as providing us with a well-grounded analysis of how a 'true' point of orientation fails.

⁶⁴ Both Kant and Kierkegaard agree that a practical attitude is genuinely different from a theoretical attitude. To treat the will and thereby what ought to be as 'knowledge of what is' (as knowledge of an invented object or as knowledge of a given object) would imply cancelling the peculiar meaning of the realm of the practical and to grasp it within the theoretical sphere. This would mean devaluing and cancelling the practical, that is, the resolve to will and to act in a certain way. Willing and its corresponding action is hence genuinely different from thinking. It belongs to different realms in each case, not only in respect of authentic willing, but also in respect of every kind of willing determined by principles (Cf. VII 272 ff. / *SKS* 7, 289 ff.). This does not mean that insofar as we will, we do not *also* think. Indeed to will without *some* corresponding thinking and hence some implicit knowledge as a *necessary* condition would be difficult to conceive of. But willing (the good) can never be *sufficiently* determined by such a thinking, because willing and thinking correspond to different kinds of 'activity'. This, I believe, is Kierkegaard's point when he stresses that thinking can never reach out to the reality of willing and I do not see a reason why Kant would not agree with Kierkegaard in this respect.

⁶⁵ Of course, the aesthetic stage of existence in Kierkegaard's work on the whole involves details that are not referred to in *Purity of Heart*. However, I do not see any reason to assume that the fundamental structure of double-mindedness cannot be taken to be characteristic of the aesthetic stage.

In other words: I want not only to provide evidence that the Kantian reasoning illuminates Kierkegaard's conception of that failure, but also suggest that Kierkegaard contributes original insights about this phenomenon.

With this in mind, I would like to summarise the main points I discuss in this chapter. First (3.1), I want briefly to refer to the basic situation of the will as standing at a crossroads and hint at the fact that inauthentic willing allows *a posteriori* incentives to be incorporated and that this kind of conception is not alien to Kierkegaard's thinking. Second (3.2), I argue that the conditionality of the principle of willing based upon hypothetical imperatives is a necessary condition of double-mindedness. Third (3.3), I contend further that double-mindedness exemplifies more specifically one species of the hypothetical imperative, namely that which aims at happiness and which Kant calls a precept of prudence. With this analogy in view, I then point to some features of Kierkegaard's account which I claim enrich the basic Kantian conception. Fourth (3.4), having demonstrated the structural similarities between double-mindedness and Kant's account of a will governed by prudence, I close with a brief discussion of the time dependency of the prudential attitude.

3.1 *Standing at the Crossroads and the Incorporation of a posteriori Incentives*

For Kant, there are two main kinds of principles which determine the will. Accordingly there are two essentially different ways in which human beings can exist. In the *Groundwork* Kant describes the general situation of a human being's will in the following way: 'the will stands as it were, at a crossroads between its *a priori* principle, which is formal, and its *a posteriori* incentive, which is material' (G 400). The human situation can be described as involving the choice between two distinctly different possibilities since the will can either be rooted in principles of morality or in principles that are governed by 'natural' incentives. This is what Kant means by saying that the will is standing at a crossroads. Kierkegaard makes extensive use of the metaphor of a crossroads. In *Purity of Heart* he emphasises repeatedly that one basically 'stands at a crossroads' (VIII 160, cf. 148, 154, 166). For Kierkegaard, as well as for Kant, the will *either* is determined *a posteriori* or is determined by (a) conception(s) of the morally good. The will can either be determined by its *a posteriori* incentives or the will can be

determined by moral principles. The dichotomy at the level of the will is thoroughly Kantian as well as Kierkegaardian.⁶⁶

However, to be determined *a posteriori* does not simply transform humans into beings which are solely governed by cause and effect (i. e., beings that belong exclusively to the realm of nature). An empirical impulse does not *mechanically* lead us to will in a certain way. Since Kant – as stated above – generally defines the will as the power to act according to a *representation* of laws, an empirical impulse has to be *incorporated* into the will's maxim ('the subjective principle of volition' (G 400) in order to determine the respective action, and hence we are fully responsible if we act accordingly.⁶⁷ This view is most clearly stated in Kant's *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*: 'An incentive can determine a will to an action only insofar as the individual has taken it up into his maxim (has made it into a general rule, according to which he will conduct himself' (R 24). Empirical incentives can never *solely* determine the will, but will always have to be *incorporated* into the will's maxim. Insofar as *a posteriori* incentives are incorporated into the will, the corresponding attitude must be described as practical. Correspondingly, the kind of representation of laws from which such an attitude stems, involves the principle of doing whatever my *a posteriori* incentives suggest I do. This already indicates that we allow our will to be motivated by *a posteriori* incentives. Correspondingly, the end of this kind of will has its origin in em-

⁶⁶ This basic 'either/or' is characteristic of Kierkegaard's thinking on the whole (although the either/or specifically discussed in *Either/Or* might be understood to have a slightly different emphasis – cf. 4.3). However, Kierkegaard would not agree with the view that there is only *one* principle which is independent of *a posteriori* incentives. According to Kierkegaard – as opposed to Kant's view – the ethical stage of existence is only *one* way of determining the will such that it is independent of *a posteriori* incentives. As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, the will may also be determined according to the paradigms of so-called Religiousness A or Religiousness B.

⁶⁷ This Kantian idea has been investigated thoroughly by Henry E. Allison *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995. We will come back to this conception when we consider Kant's and Kierkegaard's understanding of (radical) evil in the Appendix to Chapter 4. In the *Groundwork* Kant is notoriously undecided about whether we freely choose to be immoral agents or not. However, I think that it is necessary to consider immoral conduct to be grounded in a free choice of the individual since we could not be held responsible for our corresponding maxims otherwise. Kant himself emphasises in the *Groundwork* that *we make maxims* which would not make sense if he really considered them to be grounded in the *a posteriori* incentives themselves. Therefore I will take Kant's clear and decided position in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* for granted.

pirical desires although we are responsible for setting it.⁶⁸ We allow the origin of our will to be in the empirical world of natural incentives. Insofar as the principles for the determination of the will are rooted in these incentives, the respective prescription or rule is rooted in 'natural' drives. However, an *a posteriori* incentive must always be freely incorporated by the will, it is founded in nature, but we always have the choice not to act in accordance with the corresponding maxim. Accordingly, we never simply *have* maxims, we always *make* them.

Such a determination of our will has its equivalent in Kierkegaard's conception of a person's will being determined in a way which is nearly exclusively *immediate*. The significance of this assertion is underscored in the following passage from the discourse 'Every Good and Every Perfect Gift is from Above', which sums up several passages in *Purity of Heart*:

Free from care they go their way; a friendly fate makes everything easy for them. Every wish is fulfilled; their every enterprise prospers. Without understanding how, they are in the midst of the movement of life, a link in the chain that binds a past to a later time; unconcerned about how it happens, they are carried along on the wave of the present. Reposing in the law of nature that lets a human life grow up in the world as it spreads a carpet of flower over the earth, they go on living happy and contented amid the changes of life, at no moment desir[ing] to tear themselves free from them and honestly giv[ing] everyone his due ... (III 39).

Kierkegaard is generally convinced that we, despite the fact that we almost exclusively belong to nature, must take responsibility for this immediate determination. When a person belongs to nature, 'the person [...] has *abandoned* his soul to worldly appetites' (III 301, my emphasis) in one way or another, and must have thus incorporated *a posteriori* incentives. Of course, Kant and Kierkegaard are convinced that the will should not be determined by maxims which involve an incorporation of *a posteriori* incentives and which involve such an abandonment of the soul. It is their shared conviction that the empirical world is incapable of providing the ground for our practical orientation.

3.2 Hypothetical Imperatives and Double-Mindedness

In the following I will analyse the main type of principle which is incapable of 'true' practical orientation. Let us, however, keep in mind that the corresponding attitude (like the mere incorporation of a *pos-*

⁶⁸ In Chapter 4 we will see that the aim or end of a moral action is not determined *a posteriori*, but determined and set in an *a priori* way by the principle of the good will itself.

teriori incentives) is itself based upon freedom⁶⁹ and hence we will always be responsible for what we do. In *An Occasional Discourse* Kierkegaard essentially aims at an understanding of the sentence 'Purity of heart is to will one thing' (VIII 133). He intends to 'come to an understanding of this theme' by that which these 'words ... are opposing: *double-mindedness*' (VIII 134). A double-minded will is of such a nature that it shows the will's disorientation, because it has fallen away from the good will and its unifying force.⁷⁰ However, the double-minded will is incapable of abandoning the good will completely. Formally speaking, this is the very reason for its double-mindedness: As a matter of fact we will a relative good, but since we cannot abandon the act of 'willing' the non-relative good completely, we are double-minded. This comes to the fore when Kierkegaard declares the structural analogy between double-mindedness and despair: 'Or is not despair [*Fortvivelse*] actually double-mindedness [*Tvesindethed*]; or what else is it to despair but to have two wills!' (VIII 139). '[E]veryone in despair has two wills, one that he futilely wants to follow entirely, and one that he futilely wants to get rid of entirely.' (VII 139)

To get clearer about the deeper structure of Kierkegaard's conception of double-mindedness, we need to analyse that kind of will which the double-minded agent intends to actualise or, in Kierkegaard's words, 'futilely wants to follow entirely'. I think a comparison with Kant's conception of a hypothetical imperative proves illuminating.⁷¹ I will therefore analyse the general structure of a hypothetical imperative and then return to a discussion of Kierkegaard's conception of

⁶⁹ The kind of freedom which is typical of immoral conduct is what Kant later calls 'freedom of choice' (MM 213). As opposed to the positive freedom as a presupposition of moral conduct as self-legislation in terms of the categorical imperative, Kant calls this 'the negative concept of freedom' because it only denotes the 'independence from being determined by sensible impulses' (MM 213).

⁷⁰ Cf. 5.2. George Connell *To Be One Thing*, Macon: Mercer University Press 1985, has rightly seen that each of the stages of existence and hence even the aesthetic stage corresponds to a certain conception of unity. The reason for this is that all the stages are based upon certain types of principles or rules. However, it is Kierkegaard's view that each conception of unity breaks down and hence is not so to speak a *truthful* unity until the Christian stage is reached.

⁷¹ Typically, Kierkegaard is not so much concerned with the general structure of this kind of imperative since he addresses his readers in a more concrete and immediate way, in those situations in which they find themselves in everyday life. But while this may allow him to achieve a deeper psychological insight into such a person and the double-mindedness of his will, this difference rather concerns the surface of what Kierkegaard says and claims.

double-mindedness. This does not mean that acting according to hypothetical imperatives *as such* can be referred to as double-minded. However, what I claim is that the *conditionality* of willing which is characteristic of hypothetical imperatives is also characteristic of that will we follow in double-mindedness.

Hypothetical imperatives 'represent the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving something else that one wills (or that it is at least possible for one to will)' (G 414). Hence 'the imperative is conditional, namely: if or because one wills this object, one ought to act in such or such a way' (G 444). Corresponding to the fact that the will to act has the status of a means only, the kind of commitment to do the action is only a relative commitment. It is a commitment which is so to speak set by (willing) the aim or willing a certain object. But willing the aim in the first place in this case is only subjectively set and lacks the force of an unconditionally valid principle (the categorical imperative). Accordingly, the second quote emphasises that the action to be done is dependent upon a presupposition or 'hypothesis', namely the act of willing the object. Hypothetical imperatives presuppose ends and are hence commands for their realisation. Hypothetical imperatives are conditional upon an aim, but they lack the capacity of setting a moral aim by themselves. You do not will and do the action irrespective of any other concern, but only if you will the object. The action and its underlying will is not determined by a principle that sets a moral concern itself and that immediately commands to act upon it. Rather it serves as a means to something else that one wants. It is valid under a premise or hypothesis. Whereas, as we will see more clearly in later chapters, while a moral will sets its end itself in virtue of an unconditional principle as a moral end, a will based on hypothetical imperatives is set and hence conditional.

Now, it is important to see that the fact that the action to be done is determined as 'good', fits hand in hand with hypothetical imperatives: 'If you want y, then it is *good* to do x';⁷² 'x is a good action if it realises y'. Hypothetical imperatives naturally imply a certain meaning and usage of the word 'good' as a designation for the respective action. As Kant puts it: 'if the action would be good merely as a means to some-

⁷² Using this formula, I take and will take for granted that y is not an end that is set by an unconditional principle, but based upon a relative end or merely subjectively. The syntactic or logical formula itself is not specific enough to distinguish hypothetical imperatives from the categorical imperative.

thing else the imperative is hypothetical' (G 414). Thus 'the hypothetical imperative says only that the action is good for some ... purpose' (G 415). If one's purpose or aim is contingent, then the action is good, but only in a relative, not an absolute, way: the goodness of the action is dependent and conditional upon a certain aim which one intends to achieve. That this aim should be pursued or that it is morally good to pursue it is of no concern for such reasoning. Whether the aim is morally good is not raised as a question. Hence the goodness of the action only is concerned with relative ends, because it does not involve the moral goodness of the end at the same time.

With Kant's account of hypothetical imperatives in view, we can now return to Kierkegaard's account of double-mindedness. The person he again and again describes as 'double-minded' in *Purity of Heart* can best be understood as someone who bases his fundamental attitudes on conditional principles that aim at happiness. The principle of the will is hypothetical and is therefore suitable for attaining a certain end as described above. Let me first illustrate this claim by some quotes from *Purity of Heart*:

The person who wills the good only out of fear of punishment does not will one thing but is double-minded. ... The good is one thing, punishment something else. Therefore the double-minded person does not will one thing when he wills the good on the condition of thereby avoiding punishment. The condition thereby indicates precisely the double-mindedness ... (VIII 151).

'And yet he does not will the good; he wills it only out of fear of punishment. So – if there were no punishment! In this 'if' lurks the double-mindedness. If there were no punishment!! In this 'if' hisses the double-mindedness' (VIII 153; cf. VIII 154).

'To will the good only out of fear of punishment is the other side of coveting reward, in essence therefore the same as willing the good for the same reward' (VIII 151). Accordingly, Kierkegaard says of a person of the latter kind:

The good is one thing; the reward is something else. ... If, then, he wills the good for the sake of reward, he is not willing one thing but something double. It is now apparent that in this way he will not go very far on the path of the good, because it is really the same as if a person, instead of doing what is natural, using both eyes to look at one thing, were to use one eye to look to the one side and the other to look to the other side – it will not work, it only confuses the vision (VIII 144 f.).

As we have seen, a will which is based upon hypothetical imperatives can be understood as good in some sense. Such a person is good not in an unconditional way, but only in a relative way. However, it is precisely this relativity of the goodness of the will which prevents such a

person from 'willing one thing' as an unconditional commitment to do the good as the moral or religious good. The 'purity of heart' is impossible in this case, because the respective actions as well as the will which underlies them are conditional – only if you want this relative end, is it good to do the action. But to want a relative end in the first place as a condition of doing the action makes the goodness of the action conditional and hence posits the self outside a possible unity of the self (cf. VIII 231). We do not want to do the good unconditionally, but only under a hypothetical condition. Whereas the single-minded or moral person wills the good for its own sake and thereby sets the corresponding end immediately, the double-minded person wills the good in a relative way only, because her end is only a conditional or merely subjective end (to be rewarded or not to be punished).

3.3 *Prudence*

In his discussion of hypothetical imperatives, Kant distinguishes two different kinds of ends. These correspond to two different kinds of means or hypotheses determining the will by which each end may be realised. The first kind of hypothetical imperative aims at an end which any human being may or may not have. These imperatives are called 'problematical imperatives', 'imperatives of skill', 'technical imperatives' (G 414 ff.) or 'technically practical principles' (CJ 172). The second kind of hypothetical imperative aims at an end which every human being, according to Kant, actually (not possibly) has: happiness. He calls these imperatives 'assertoric' and 'pragmatic' imperatives as well as 'precepts of prudence' (G 415 f.). The three main parts of *Purity of Heart* analyse what it means to be double-minded in an increasingly more concrete way. To this end, Kierkegaard focuses his discussion of double-mindedness on the concept of *prudence* or *sagacity* [*Klogskab*], by which he enriches the Kantian framework. Before illustrating this, however, I think we should return to Kant and consider his analysis of prudence.

Hypothetical imperatives understood in this latter way can be described as regulations which provide a means in order to attain happiness: 'skill in the choice of means to one's own greatest well-being can be called *prudence* in the narrowest sense' (G 416). It is Kant's conviction that 'all people have already, of themselves, the strongest and deepest inclination towards happiness, because it is just in this idea that all inclinations unite in one sum' (G 399). It is difficult to decide

in what way this goal of happiness comes into the mind of each individual. It seems that Kant is making an empirical claim by saying that the goal of happiness is present in human beings as a matter of fact. However, does he think that as a matter of fact human beings cannot fail to take into account their own happiness in *each* of their actions or does he say that human beings cannot fail to consider happiness as an outcome of a certain number or sum of actions? Despite the indefiniteness of Kant's account, it is clear that although human beings strive towards happiness, its attainment is difficult, insecure and not really possible to control, because the concept of happiness and hence its end is based on *a posteriori* grounds.

Kierkegaard does not refer explicitly to hypothetical imperatives as principles which aim at the realisation of a *possible* end. However, he is extremely interested in the other kind of hypothetical imperative which aims at the realisation of an actual end: happiness. While it is true that the exact status of the will to happiness remains, as in Kant's account, unclear in the relevant passages of *Purity of Heart*, there is no doubt that from Kierkegaard's point of view human beings do have the strongest inclination towards happiness to such a degree that this end must be seen as an 'actual' end in every human being. Therefore it is not at all astonishing that the concept of prudence or the respective principle upon which it is based is of greatest significance in *Purity of Heart*.⁷³ What is stated by Kant succinctly and abstractly is broadened and brilliantly deepened by Kierkegaard. Prudence 'which is misused *outwardly*' (VIII 186) corresponds to what Kant describes as 'worldly wisdom' – It is 'a human being's skill in influencing others so as to use them for his own purposes' (G 416, footnote). This conception follows the general pattern of hypothetical imperatives 'if you want y, then do x'. Thereby the aim of one's own happiness which is intended to be realised through a certain attitude or through conduct of another person is not made transparent or obvious to the other person. To relate to others in order to increase my own happiness typically involves misusing them in a way which is not obvious to them. Hence it is understandable that the misuse of applying the principle of this kind of prudence is called 'deception' by Kierkegaard (cf. VIII 186) or as 'going around a little on the side' (VIII 187): outward pru-

⁷³ This is valid of numerous other, especially later, writings such as the *Postscript*, *Works of Love* and *Two Ages*.

dence typically involves deceiving the other person.⁷⁴ This connects with what Kierkegaard means by the ‘secret of the deception’ and the corresponding meaning of the word ‘good’, typical of hypothetical imperatives:

But the secret of the deception to which all manifestations of it can be traced in one way or another is this: that it is not human beings after all, who stand in need of the good, but the good that stands in need of human beings. Therefore they must be won, because the good is a poor beggar who is in need, rather than human beings who stand in need of the good ... (VIII 186).⁷⁵

The statement that ‘the good ... stands in need of human beings’ again reveals the conditionality of the action (and the underlying will) and at the same time the limited use of the concept ‘good’ which is so typical of hypothetical imperatives and more specifically of a prudential attitude. Human beings are used such that some good, namely one’s own happiness, is attained. The other is used in a way that is good for me since it increases my happiness. In other words: the good is a ‘poor beggar’, because it is not in and of itself capable of being realised, but is conditional upon taking the other as a means. On the contrary, to say that human beings are in need of the good gives expression to the claim that they deserve to be treated as ends in themselves, as Kant would put it. Insofar as I treat the other as an end in itself, my will is an unconditional good will. It is not conditional upon any other goal, not even the goal I always have – my happiness. It is tempting at this point to have a quick look at one of the examples that Kant gives in the *Groundwork*:

For example, it certainly conforms with duty that a shopkeeper not overcharge an experienced customer and where there is a good deal of trade a prudent merchant does not overcharge but keeps a fixed general price for anyone, so that a child can buy from him as well as everyone else. People are thus served honestly; but this is not nearly enough for us to believe that the merchant acted in this way from duty and basic principles of honesty; his advantage required it ... (G 397).

The *prudent* merchant serves honestly, that is, acts in conformity with duty as Kant would say. But he does do so, it seems, because of his very

⁷⁴ We can discern here the prototype of *inauthentic communication* as Kierkegaard conceives of it, which implies the kind of deception characteristic of, for example, the so-called ‘seducer’ in *Either/Or I*. The self in relation to others is generally emphasised in *Two Ages*, not only when it is inauthentic, but also in its authentic mode.

⁷⁵ In an analogous passage Kierkegaard claims: ‘This was the secret of the deception – that it is the good that stands in need of people; the sagacious person’s secret is that he cannot be totally satisfied with the good’s meager reward but must earn a little on the side – by going around a little on the side’ (VIII 186 f.).

own advantage. It does not take much imagination to suppose that he does not will one thing as the morally good, but only pretends to his customers to be thus motivated. In other words, he deceives his customers with respect to the very reasons for his actions. On the one hand, he pretends to relate to them in an honest way or pretends to do the good because it is the good and, on the other hand, he relates to them in such a way because of his self-interest. And he may 'win' his costumers precisely in virtue of this very ambivalence, which he, of course, necessarily hides. Here, a nuance of double-mindedness emerges within the area of intersubjective relationships: It is the *Schein* of moral goodness that is communicated and this communication is based upon a double-minded attitude or will: I pretend to treat you as an end in itself as a precondition of using you as a means only. In interpersonal relationships, the will one 'futilely wants to get rid of entirely' or some kind of representation of the authentic will is itself used in order to realise that will one 'futilely wants to follow entirely' (VII 139).

Part of the reason Kierkegaard is in a position to discuss the nature of prudence in a more fully-fledged way has to do with the fact that he describes it from two different angles: Not to do x unconditionally, that is, to be prudential, can be described not only as (a) aiming at a goal different from the goal of the good will, but it can also be described from the perspective of (b) an absence of decisiveness.⁷⁶ However, to aim at a goal different from that of a good will includes leaving out decisiveness and simply to leave out decisiveness includes aiming at a goal different from that of a good will on principle. The description of prudence which focuses on leaving out decisiveness is characterised by Kierkegaard as an inward use of prudence, to which Kant does not refer explicitly. Here and in the following I can only give a vague impression of the richness of Kierkegaard's analysis: '*Inwardly* a person uses *sagacity in a pernicious way* to prevent himself from stepping out into decision. It can be misused in countless ways, but in order again not to proliferate the unimportant and thereby draw attention away from what is important, we shall again describe this misuse with one definite phrase: *to seek evasion*' (VIII 182).

The other means by which Kierkegaard gives a more differentiated picture of the facets of the phenomenon of prudence have to do with

⁷⁶ Although decisiveness is not a genuinely Kantian term, it involves a conception of morality which is in conformity with Kant's basic claim in the first section of *Groundwork*, namely that a good will corresponds to self-legislation in terms of 'doing x unconditionally'.

the fact that he, unlike Kant, distinguishes an active will – a ‘will to do’ (VIII 179) – from a more passive will – a ‘will to suffer’ (VIII 179). He, accordingly, distinguishes a second kind of inward prudence. Although in his practical philosophy Kant does not refer to the passivity of the will, the general structure of his basic conception of the principle of prudence is not left behind. Kierkegaard’s distinction between an active and a passive will must therefore be seen as an *elaboration* of the Kantian account rather than simply un-Kantian. The passivity of the will comes to the fore in terms of suffering: ‘*At this point, sagacity is misused internally*, since for the person who suffers essentially it is not easy to misuse it outwardly’ (VIII 207). The general pattern of prudential conduct was, to stress it once more, ‘if you want y, then do x’. Insofar as the will is a suffering will, y resembles a state of affairs in which the sufferings have ceased to exist which themselves can be described as being directed towards happiness; ‘x’ does not resemble an outward action, which according to the above quote is impossible, but, an inward action, so to speak. This inward action can be described as both leaving out decisiveness (cf. VIII 207) and as aiming at a goal different from that of the good will. Hence it formally shares the decisive features of prudence in its active markedness. Although such a will is incapable of influencing the outward world directly or actively, it nevertheless is related to this world internally. This holds in the case of hope as a characteristic way of (passively) aiming at or hoping for a goal different from the good will. The existence of the sufferer who misuses prudence indirectly is characterised by a kind of hope, seen as a means of getting rid of her sufferings:

Alas, in the long run we really come to see what sagacity and earthly hope are! Yet to sagacity it seems very sagacious not foolishly to give up an earthly hope for a possible fantastic healing – in order to win the eternal. To sagacity it seems very sagacious not to say farewell to the world decisively; after all, one still does not know what possibly could happen...and then one would regret – having allowed oneself to be healed by the eternal (VIII 208).

Such suffering is not the kind of suffering in which the good will of the sufferer is required to ‘*will everything for the good*’ and in which he decisively ‘*will[s] to be and to remain with the good*’. On the contrary, he has not yet known decisive suffering and its respective unconditional willing.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ This is the viewpoint from which to understand Kierkegaard’s saying: ‘A person may have suffered a whole lifetime without its being possible in any way to say truthfully of him that he has willed to suffer all for the good’ (VIII 196).

As was pronounced before, double-mindedness or the prudential will shows itself as soon as I stand at a crossroads and have to decide whether I want to follow my *a posteriori* incentives or their sum total (my actual end of happiness) on the one hand or to do the good for its own sake as willing one thing as Kierkegaard says on the other hand. The (continuing) abandonment of the good as the 'one thing' and the pursual of another goal instead suggests the situation of standing at a crossroad as the basic human condition. Keeping this situation in mind, I will begin to investigate how time is at the heart of the prudential will.

3.4 Time as the Condition of the Possibility of Prudence

Given the structural similarities between double-mindedness and Kant's account of those wills that act in accordance with prudence, I now want to turn to a brief discussion of the time-dependency of prudential conduct. First I will refer to Kant's discussion of the temporal underpinnings of the prudential attitude, and then I will close with a final look at Kierkegaard's own account. I want to show that according to Kierkegaard as well as Kant, prudence is rooted in time. This will bring into view something that could be called the temporality of prudence.

The prudential will aims at the realisation of an end we definitely have: happiness as some kind of evaluation of all my *a posteriori* incentives. As a hypothetical imperative it is conditional upon this very end or is conditional upon the end as merely subjectively set in virtue of an incorporation of (all) my *a posteriori* incentives. Such setting of an aim in one way or the other belongs to the realm of the natural world (world of the senses). It is not a possible aim, but it is actual, i. e. we always set it.

But it is a misfortune that the concept of happiness is such an indeterminate concept that, although every human being wishes to attain this, he can still never say determinately and consistently with himself what he really wishes and wills. The cause of this is that all the elements that belong to the concept of happiness are without exception empirical, that is, they must be borrowed from experience ... (G 418)

Correspondingly, the state of affair or effect at which such an end aims can, in principle, be arrived at in virtue of an understanding of the connection between causes and effects according to rules in nature and its causalities. Principles of prudence are founded in concepts

of nature. According to Kant such principles of the prudential will can only be determined empirically or *a posteriori*.

In short, he is not capable of any principle by which to determine with complete certainty what would make him truly happy, because for this omniscience would be required. One cannot therefore act on determinate principles for the sake of being happy, but only on empirical counsels ... From this it follows that imperatives of prudence cannot, so to speak precisely, command at all, that is, present actions objectively as practically necessary. (G 418)

We can now begin to see why a will which has its origin in such a kind of principle cannot provide our moral orientation. Hypothetical imperatives have the structure 'if you want y, then do x'. In order to realise y (happiness) I have to do (and will) an x that has the capacity to be a cause of y. Our prudential attitude is conditional upon realising happiness. The possibility of realising happiness is rooted in knowledge of its possible cause. But such knowledge is based upon a chronological relation which can only be determined on *a posteriori* grounds. Therefore it is always (a certain understanding of) *time* which is at the heart of our disorientation.

Although Kierkegaard does not argue for the time-dependency of the prudential attitude in as formal a way as Kant does, this seems to be the core or the general idea which lies behind his account of disorientation or what he calls the failure of the unity of the self. In the first few pages of the Preface of *Purity of Heart* (VIII 120–124), although Kierkegaard does not yet analyse the prudential attitude explicitly, he is already concerned with the problem of time when he begins to give his account of inauthentic subjectivity. Kierkegaard calls the corresponding life-view the 'wisdom of the years' (VIII 122) or 'worldly wisdom' (VIII 124). This life-view emphasises that incidents and attitudes in human beings occur at certain stages of life. It is a life view which takes for granted that 'everything has its time' (VIII 120 ff.), which means that a human being's life primarily consists in a chronological order of various contents. It is time which is at the heart of human beings' striving. What one is supposed to do has its basis in time and what other people think has to be done at certain times. The 'do this now, that then and that afterwards' already gives account of the pursuit of one's happiness from an outer or 'sociological' perspective. It is thereby suggested that a life view or a conception of the nature of human beings which thus emphasises that everything has its time and thereby is divided by time cannot really provide a foundation of the will. Against this background, it is not astonishing that Kierkegaard understands the principle of prudence as belonging to the realm of the

finite, changeable world in time as opposed to the realm of the good will. By investigating something which can be called the ‘temporality of prudence’, he finally arrives at insights into the time-dependency of a disunified, untruthful and deceptive human existence. In order to show this time-dependency, I will refer to Kierkegaard’s analysis of outward prudence which he contrasts with being decisive.⁷⁸ The rootedness in time comes to the fore in an ‘existential’ way in *Purity of Heart*. Kierkegaard’s analysis can in some sense be understood as being complementary to the abstract Kantian account. In this connection I can only allude to the richness of the Dane’s analysis of temporality and show its fundamental agreement with Kant.

Let us once again remember what outward prudence consists in. Outward prudence (deceitfully) takes other people as a means with the aim of increasing one’s own happiness. How can we succeed in realising this state of affairs by means of what we do? – We conceive of them as being a (caused) cause for this state of our mind as its effect. The more we know how people react to what we do, the better we will succeed in realising the ‘sum total’ of the satisfaction of our *a posteriori* incentives. The more the individual bases her principles on ‘knowledge of nature’ of human beings, the better she realises her happiness. According to Kierkegaard, the prudential attitude fundamentally involves being determined and absorbed by time: ‘the more the striving person is allied to temporality instead of willing the eternal or the morally good, the more he accomplishes in the temporal sense’ (VIII 188). To base the principles of our will on counsels of prudence brings us into an essential affinity with time. We become an ally to temporality. Being such a kind of ally is a key in order to ‘understand oneself and life with regard to what it means to accomplish so extraordinarily much’ (VIII 188). This meaning involves the peculiar kind of effectiveness or accomplishment of the prudential attitude. According to Kierkegaard, this meaning does not primarily concern the question as to if, or how effective, these principles are as a matter of fact. It rather concerns their *essential* effectiveness or accomplishment, i. e., the way in which they *allow* an action to be effective. What is the meaning of such an accomplishment? Formally, the meaning is of the same kind as in Kant’s conception. The precept of prudence presupposes an understanding of the time dependent relation or rule ‘if you want y, then

⁷⁸ The temporality of outward prudence is discussed in a more detailed way than both forms of inward prudence. Since all kinds of prudence are of the same type, as I showed above, the implicit understanding of temporality is also of the same type.

do x'. Kierkegaard refers to this kind of understanding as 'temporality ... understood ... as it is a fact recognisable in actuality' (VIII 188). Every actual prudential attitude presupposes this kind of temporality as a condition of its possibility. The meaning of accomplishment of the prudential self is being an ally to temporality. The accomplishment of the prudential attitude is also characterised by Kierkegaard as 'the view of the moment': 'The view of the moment is the estimate that according to an earthly and busy understanding decides whether a person is accomplishing something or not' (VIII 189). This momentary view stems from an understanding of time that corresponds to the time of natural incidents being causally connected. It is this understanding of time which must be seen as the condition of the possibility of the prudential attitude. And it is this understanding of time, this alliance with time in which the disorientation of the self has its origin. Finally it is time in the Gestalt of dividing the way in which we conceive of the world, that is, in terms of the 'now this', 'now this', 'now this' which is responsible for the self as inauthentic subjectivity.

The meaning of what is accomplished by prudential conduct can also be described in terms of its impact on that possibility which it fails to realise. (Remember that according to Kant and Kierkegaard, the self is fundamentally standing at a crossroads and can only be determined *either* by non-moral *or* moral/religious principles.) In this respect the meaning of prudential conduct simply lies in its break with moral/religious principles. Thereby the temporality of the prudent self 'is the *refraction* of the eternal'⁷⁹. ... This makes the category „to accomplish“ less direct' (VIII 188). Indeed, as we have seen, it is characteristic of the (outward) prudential attitude to use the other as a means in order to attain happiness and hence to be indirect. And we can now say that it is the peculiar time-dependency of prudence that corresponds to this indirection in accomplishment.

As opposed to a prudential attitude the specific effectiveness characteristic of a moral/religious attitude does not contain indirection. It directly and immediately contains 'the *uniform* transparency of the eternal' (VIII 188). The eternal is transparent because the corresponding attitude is not conditional upon an external or conditional end to be realised. It is not, accordingly, rooted in a chronological re-

⁷⁹ Surely, the concept of eternity does not have a place in Kants conception of ethics. However, it is essential to recognize the peculiar meanings of this concept in Kierkegaard's thinking. As I will show, this concept is analogous to an unconditionally good will and its corresponding principle in respect of the ethical and the religious stages.

lation. On the contrary, the eternal stems from an unconditional principle. Its goodness is not dependent upon the aim to realise happiness, but is unconditionally good and hence the essence of a good will. Only such a good can give our proper practical orientation since there is no other concern except its own. Together with Kant, Kierkegaard claims that he thereby refers to what morality/religiousness fundamentally consists in, namely to do the good simply because it is the good. This is the kind of eternity upon which we should base our life and only then may disorientation be ruled out according to Kierkegaard.⁸⁰

In the first chapter we saw that making a statement about reality involves a contradiction since that which is supposed to be real is necessarily ideal at the same time. As I have argued, Kierkegaard rejects even a *relative* solution to the implicit scepticism of this situation since he considers an *a priori* mediation between subject and object (involving a certain agreement or unity) – as suggested by Kant's epistemology – to be impossible (Chapter 2). To give up the search for such agreement within the theoretical sphere of judgements and hence to be concerned with the practical dimension (that is, with the dimension of the will) must be seen as a kind of 'progress', because the corresponding rules are justifiable but insufficient (Kant) or fully unjustifiable (Kierkegaard) with regard to our 'true' practical orientation. As we have seen in this chapter, a conception of the will is rooted in time. Prudence is rooted in time, the will that is based upon such attitude is still crucially disoriented and the self is trapped in contradiction with an unconditional good.

In the next chapters we shall consider Kierkegaard's strategy for overcoming the prudential attitude. Basically we shall see how Kierkegaard bases the will upon something unconditional/eternal and what kinds of determinations show themselves. I will thereby bring into view how Kierkegaard's corresponding conception of the self is deeply rooted in the basic framework of Kant's practical philosophy as expounded in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

⁸⁰ However, unlike Kant, Kierkegaard has much more to say about how the thus understood eternal relates to our existence in time, whereby it 'make(s) time *its own*' (VIII 123) – an issue that is beyond the scope of what I am addressing in this book.

Chapter 4

The Ethical Stage

So far we have seen several different expressions of the failure of a justifiable situatedness or orientation in Kierkegaard's thinking. In contrast to Kant, Kierkegaard's epistemology did not allow any kind of *a priori* unity between the understanding and sensibility, because no rules of the understanding could be justified as a necessary presupposition of the experience of objects. Hence our relation to the world could not be based upon any kind of such *a priori* unity. The knowledge of nature could attain only an 'infinite approximation' to nature, but could not impose laws on nature. Hence we could not yield objectively valid judgements with regard to objects we receive in space and time (empirical data unified in an *a priori* way according to rules). Thinking could not make possible a system of existence. However, Kierkegaard's understandable recommendation that we refer actuality not to thinking but to the ethical (VII 282 / *SKS* 7, 298) or that we look for orientation within the actuality of the ethical cannot simply refer to actuality as the practical dimension or to the human will as *such*. As was shown in the previous chapter, the prudential will is founded in a certain understanding of time. Accordingly, the principle upon which this will is based is conditional. The orientation it gives is only valid under a condition whereby this condition rests upon the end of happiness that we (always) set subjectively but which does not have the status of universal validity.

The main concern of the next chapter will be to show how Kierkegaard refers actuality to the ethical as the moral. As we will see the moral is based on a principle that is not conditional, but unconditional. Only an unconditional principle does not rely on a conditional end. *What kind of rule or what kind of principle can count as being unconditional?* This crucial question has not yet been answered and will be discussed in the first part of this chapter. First of all (4.1) this will involve a discussion of the basic features of the so-called *categorical imperative* as expounded in the second section of the *Groundwork*.

Thereafter (4.2), I will show that these features at least do not contradict fundamental aspects of the ethical stage of existence according to Kierkegaard. In the end (4.3) I will refer to the problem of the justification of the ethical.

4.1 *The Principle of the Good Will as the Categorical Imperative*

When we assess whether someone is a moral agent or not, we evaluate her will. According to Kant, the will is a moral will if it is good as such. We act morally if our will is an unconditionally good will. Since we can always choose to act in a non-moral way, we have to *oblige* ourselves so that our actions are based upon an unconditionally good will: the good as duty. Furthermore, it must arise *from* duty, because it can only be motivated by itself – otherwise the will would not be unconditionally good. Now, if the good will cannot be motivated and hence determined, so to speak, from outside itself, it must be determined from within itself. In other words, its worth or its essence must stem from *its principle* and since it is an unconditional good will it must, accordingly, be an unconditional principle.⁸¹

According to Kant, the principle of the good will, that is, of morality, is the categorical imperative. The main characteristics of the categorical imperative are its strict *universality* (and hence its *refusal of any exception*), its *objectivity* and its *rationality*. All of these important features are inseparable from each other and illuminate from different angles what kind of principle it consists of.⁸²

Let us first of all analyse the *universality* of the principle of the categorical imperative. Principles are rules and as such must be understood as being general. Principles of so-called hypothetical imperatives are not unconditionally valid or are not universal. Hypothetical imperatives presuppose a certain relative end, and hence what they command is dependent upon this relative end.⁸³ Therefore, the corre-

⁸¹ These fundamental intuitions of what morality consists in according to Kant, *independent* of the specific principle of morality or the categorical imperative, are characteristic of Kierkegaard's ethical and religious stage as exposed in *Purity of Heart*. I will show this in an explicit way in the next chapter in respect of the religious stage.

⁸² Since all the main characteristics of the categorical imperative are indeed inseparable from each other or represent what Kant generally calls 'reciprocal concepts' it is impossible to abstract *completely* from the other features when discussing any one of them.

⁸³ As opposed to Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* the *Groundwork* does not give a fully developed theory of ends with regard to hypothetical and categorical imperatives.

sponding rule must be conditional: 'if you want y (where y is a relative end), then do x'. 'To do x' is based upon a principle of the will which is not universally valid since it should only be applied on condition of wanting the relative end of y in the first place. By contrast, the principle of the categorical imperative is not dependent upon any relative end. It is rather the objectively valid source of determining an end (and hence does *not lack* an end). It means that the law itself is capable of specifying what end should be set.⁸⁴ Insofar as the end is set by the categorical imperative in such a way, it is an end in itself according to Kant. As a result, an end in itself cannot be limited but is unlimited: 'do x' and have this kind of unconditional end irrespective of any particular relative end and any particular situation by letting your will be determined by a law which is universally valid without any limitation:

When I think of a *hypothetical* imperative in general I do not know beforehand what it will contain; I do not know this until I am given the condition. But when I think of a *categorical imperative* I know at once what it contains. For, since the imperative contains, beyond the law, only the necessity that the maxim be in conformity with this law, while the law contains no condition to which it would be limited, nothing is left with which the maxim of action is to conform but the universality of a law as such; and this conformity alone is what the imperative properly represents as necessary (G 421).

The law of the categorical imperative is a universal law and hence applies to every human being as such independent of any circumstances in which she finds herself. Hence the generality of the categorical imperative is not imposed upon every human being by a presupposed end like happiness which we all have as a matter of fact according to Kant. Even in that case the end might still apply merely accidentally to every human being and its generality would not be unconditional.

One important consequence of the universality of the categorical imperative is that it *allows no exceptions* whatsoever. It is characteristic of Kant's position that the source of any putative exception from the moral law is to be found in our *a posteriori* incentives and our decision to incorporate them into our maxim:

[We] take the liberty of making an *exception* to it for ourselves (or just for this once) to the advantage of our inclination. Consequently, if we weighted all cases from one and the same point of view, namely that of reason, we would find a contradiction in our own

⁸⁴ Allen W. Wood *Kant's Ethical Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, p. 70. Accordingly, the so-called end-in-itself-formula of the categorical imperative says: 'So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means' (G 429).

will, namely that a certain principle be objectively necessary as a universal law and yet subjectively not hold universally, but allow exceptions (G 424).

Consequently, permitting such an exception would be to break with morality. An exception simply contradicts the universality and necessity of the moral law and according to Kant cannot therefore have the quality of moral worth. As in his theory of knowledge the particular must be in accordance with the universal. If it is not, then it is not a possible object of our knowledge. This corresponds to his ethical theory. Any particular which is not in accordance with the moral law, any action which cannot be interpreted as an instance of this generality, is not allowed, or, if it occurs, is without moral worth.

Inseparable from the universality of the categorical imperative is its *objectivity*. It is important to see that this kind of objectivity is indeed different from the kind of objectivity which is possible in the realm of knowledge of nature according to Kant. As I showed in Chapter 2, Kant is convinced that he has demonstrated that the understanding is capable of objectively determining empirical data. By virtue of the unifying functions of the categories that are grounded in the transcendental unity of apperception, judgements related to the empirical manifold gain the status of being objectively valid. Hence objectivity in this sense refers to the world as we perceive it in space and time, as an object of experience. For the categorical imperative, being objective does not involve reference to such sense perceptions in space and time. On the contrary, the object of the categorical imperative remains completely in the noumenal sphere, i.e. in a sphere which is fully independent of space and time and solely concerned with reason alone. Hence Kant identifies 'being objective' with 'being determined from grounds that are valid for every rational being as such' (G 413). The law of the categorical imperative in the practical sphere is not empty in the same way as the understanding is empty in the theoretical sphere when it lacks any reference to intuitions. According to Kant, the categories are objectively valid only if they are applied in an *a priori* way to intuitions, but the law of the categorical imperative is objectively valid without such application.⁸⁵ Despite this difference, the categories as well as the categorical imperative are both principles which, each of them in their own way, must be understood as objectively valid. This also means that, according to Kant, both of them are universally valid.

⁸⁵ However, there is nevertheless an analogy between the two kinds of laws since the categorical imperative should indeed be applied (unconditionally) and should indeed be realised (unconditionally) in the empirical world as well.

Let us look more closely at the peculiar kind of *rationality* which is embodied in the categorical imperative. Kant asserts:

For, only law brings with it the concept of an unconditional and objective and hence universally valid necessity, and commands are laws that must be obeyed, that is, must be followed even against inclination. *Giving counsel* does involve necessity, which however, can hold only under a subjective and contingent condition, whether this or that man counts this or that in his happiness; the categorical imperative, on the contrary, is limited by no condition and, as absolutely although practically necessary, can be called quite strictly a command (G 416).

It is evident for Kant that the categorical imperative has this quality of being ‘absolutely necessary’. In the *Preface of Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals* Kant already expresses this claim: ‘Everyone must grant that a law, if it is to hold morally, that is, as a ground of obligation, must carry with it absolute necessity’ (G 389). The categorical imperative is not a rule which is reasonable *under the condition* or presupposition that we want to attain an end set by our natural desires (*a posteriori* incentives), but it is a rule that is reasonable in itself and thereby unconditionally sets the end internally:

Finally there is one imperative that, without being based upon and having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by certain conduct, commands this conduct immediately. This imperative is categorical. It has to do not with the matter of the action and what is to result from it, but with the form and the principle from which the action itself follows; and the essentially good in the action consists in the disposition, let the result be what it may. This imperative may be called the imperative of morality (G 416).

According to Kant it is ‘immediately’ clear what the categorical imperative says and commands since we do not have to take into account any specific circumstances or conditions. The rationality or reason of the categorical imperative is not conditional or relative, but according to Kant it is the principle of rationality as such. Correspondingly, the law of the categorical imperative (as well as the action which it commands) is unconditionally rational.⁸⁶

In what does this unconditional rationality or absolute necessity consist? Let us have a look at what Kant explicitly says about the cate-

⁸⁶ Hypothetical imperatives can be referred to as principles of a rational (and, as seen above, good) will as well. But in this latter case the kind of rationality or necessity is not complete or unconditional, but conditional upon ‘wanting y (being itself conditional)’ as well as conditional upon the corresponding knowledge of nature in order to realise and to attain this aim (y). Therefore, as we saw in the last chapter, the principles of hypothetical imperatives can only gain the status of ‘rules of skill’ or ‘counsels of prudence’ (G 416). According to Kant we can only speak of ‘commands (laws)’ (G 416) if we deal with an unconditional rational rule – the categorical imperative.

gorical imperative: ‘*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*’ (G 421).⁸⁷ Accordingly Kant claims a few pages later: ‘We must *be able to will* that a maxim of our action become a universal law: this is the canon of moral appraisal of action in general’ (G 424). The subjective principle of our volition or the maxim of our action must, as Kant claims, be in accordance with the categorical imperative as a universal law. The universality and the rationality of the categorical imperative are one and the same. This we can also see by means of the following consideration. Insofar as the maxim is in accordance with the universality of the law of the categorical imperative, it must be the case that the will can be *derived* from this law. Such derivation is the act of practical reason since, according to Kant, ‘*reason is required for the derivation of actions from laws*’ (G 412).⁸⁸ Only if we can derive the will from the categorical imperative as the universal law, is it then possible to refer to this will as a reasonable and moral will according to Kant. To derive the will from the categorical imperative and to act upon it exemplifies practical reason, that is, it exemplifies the capacity to act in accordance with a fully rational law. Insofar as we can derive an action and its corresponding will from the categorical imperative, it is a rational will and this means at the same time that it can be universalised.

However, as we can easily see, Kant makes a reasonable maxim dependent upon the possibility of a successful derivation from practical reason or the principle of the categorical imperative. In other words, Kant explains the rationality of the categorical imperative in terms of the possibility of deriving the principles of actions from this very imperative itself. As Kant says, a rational will ‘is nothing other than practical reason’, but since practical reason consists crucially in the ‘deri-

⁸⁷ To deal with all the different formulae of the categorical imperative would require a separate discussion and need not be done here, since my main concern is to show the extent to which Kant’s and Kierkegaard’s thinking can be understood as being internally connected. However, despite the different formulae it is clear that Kant is convinced that there is only *one* categorical imperative that can be *expressed* differently. This conviction, however, is highly problematic.

⁸⁸ Correspondingly, Kant says, after having discussed four applications of the categorical imperative: ‘These are a few of the many actual duties ... whose derivation from the one principle cited above [the principle of the categorical imperative] is clear’ (G 423 f.). Formally this definition of reason can be applied to a will insofar it is based upon *either* the categorical *or* a hypothetical imperative. In this connection I abstract from the latter possibility of a conditional rationality and only refer to the unconditional rationality of the categorical imperative.

vation of actions from laws' (G 412), it follows that a rational will is (or derives its meaning from) such practical derivation from reason. Since this determination of practical reason is circular (circularity of definition), the Kantian account is not fully convincing at this point.⁸⁹ But let us not forget that Kant does not pretend to have shown more than what he wants to make his readers believe. The second section of *Groundwork* does not seek to provide a proof of the categorical imperative and hence an absolute *justification* of its reasonableness (as the third section does). Rather, Kant aims at giving an account of the possibility of this highest principle of morality and does not want to show its absolute necessity (yet).

A practical derivation must be capable of being reasonable theoretically. In this respect it denotes the activity of *inferring*. Accordingly, practical reason is in agreement with Kant's overall determination of theoretical reason as the faculty of drawing inferences.⁹⁰ Such inferences essentially belong to the realm of judgements. Insofar as we infer, our mind infers from one judgement (with respect to the categorical imperative) to another judgement (with respect to a maxim or subjective principle of volition). A maxim or a subjective principle of volition must be capable of being reasonable in the sense that we must be capable of inferring from the corresponding former assertion to the corresponding latter. A practical derivation must thus be capable of being represented in terms of theoretical inference or reasoning.⁹¹

⁸⁹ However, another more positive way to express this is that Kant does not have a 'reductionist' view.

⁹⁰ In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he claims: 'Knowledge from principles is, therefore, that knowledge alone in which I apprehend the particular in the universal through concepts. Thus every syllogism is a mode of deducing knowledge from a principle' (B357). Accordingly, a few pages later Kant contends: 'In every process of reasoning there is a fundamental proposition, and another, namely the conclusion, which is drawn from it, and finally, the inference (logical sequence) by which the truth of the latter is inseparably connected with the truth of the former' (B360).

⁹¹ Surely a maxim can be in accordance with the categorical imperative only if it can be willed *and* thought as being in accordance with this universal law according to Kant. Thereby complete duties correspond to their capability of being universalised in terms of thinking whereas incomplete duties correspond to their capability of being universalised in terms of willing (cf. G 424). Schönecker/Wood *Kant's Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Schöningh 2002, pp. 130 ff., have shown how problematic this conception is.

As being reasonable both practically and theoretically, the categorical imperative must also be *in accordance with the laws of general logic*. I addressed in Chapter 1 the necessity of such an accordance with respect to judgement and the categories. In order to apply the judgements or the categories of thought to objects by means of synthesizing the raw data of intuitions they have to fulfil one necessary, though, not, sufficient condition as a *negative* condition of truth. As belonging to general logic (cf. B159) the categories and their corresponding judgements cannot be *logically self-contradictory*, that is, they have to be in accordance with the principle of contradiction. This inevitable condition of being logically coherent is shared by the principle of the categorical imperative. It lies at the heart of the definition of reason as a derivation from the law of the categorical imperative. In order to derive a will from the categorical imperative, we must be able to conclude from the latter to the former and, most importantly, this conclusion implies or presupposes the principle of contradiction. But unless we make this inference in a way which is logically coherent and is hence in accordance with the principle of contradiction, we will not really be able to draw an inference at all. Clearly the principle of contradiction is presupposed in understanding *and* in reason. Hence, understanding (as the capacity of rules) and reason (as the capacity of principles) must be regarded as related in character, though they operate or show their functions in different respects or at different levels.⁹²

4.2 Kierkegaard's Kantian Conception of Ethics

I will now show that Kant's and Kierkegaard's understandings of the ethical share decisive features. In order to do so I will refer to a few passages from the *Concept of Anxiety* and then mainly refer to Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. It is my view that the basic features of Kierkegaard's account of the ethical are in full harmony with what Kant says about morality. While it ought to be stressed that Kierkegaard is not a thinker who simply *repeats* the Kantian, it will become evident nonetheless that he owes much to Kant in crucial aspects of the conception of the ethical. At the same time, I do not want to claim

⁹² I cannot do justice to the very complicated relations between understanding and reason. Such an investigation would be a book on its own. Generally one can say that there is much evidence for the fact that Kant never solved the problem as to how his theoretical philosophy relates to his practical philosophy.

that we *have to* read Kierkegaard in this way. Each of the *Problemata* in *Fear and Trembling* also introduces a Hegelian *modus ponens*. By showing that Kierkegaard's ethical stage stands in no obvious contradiction with what Kant says, however I want to show the possibility of a future debate about whether Kierkegaard retrieves something in Kant (on another basis) that Hegel leaves behind or whether Kierkegaard is a straightforward Kantian.

First of all, however, I want to pay attention to some general remarks by Kierkegaard concerning what he understands by ethics. In order to do that, I quote from the introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety*:⁹³ 'Ethics points to ideality as a task'⁹⁴ and assumes that every man possesses the requisite conditions' (IV 288 / SKS 4, 324). 'The more ideal ethics is, the better. It must not permit itself to be distracted by the babble that it is useless to require the impossible' (IV 289 / SKS 4, 324). 'The more ethics remains in its ideality, and never becomes so inhuman as to lose sight of actuality, but corresponds to actuality by presenting itself as the task for every man in such a way that it will make him the true and the whole man, the man ... [in an eminent sense], the more it increases the tension of the difficulty' (IV 290 / SKS 4, 325). The ideality of ethics and of the corresponding task or demand is clearly at the core of Kant's conception of ethics or morality. According to Kant, the sole source of the moral worth of an action lies in its principle. This principle cannot itself be determined or influenced by any *a posteriori* or psychological factor and it cannot be dependent upon the outcome or success of the corresponding action (cf. 5.3.2). Hence it must be an ideal principle. Since human beings are finite and therefore not necessarily determined by the ideal principle of the good will, such an ideality can only be realised insofar as we conceive of it as our (self-imposed) duty (cf. 5.3.1). By acting from duty our actions become solely determined by ideality.

These decisive features of what can count as a moral action sharply distinguish the position shared by Kant and Kierkegaard from the Greek view of ethics. As Kierkegaard himself emphasises, Greek ethics 'was not ethics in the proper sense, but retained an aesthetic factor'

⁹³ For the time being I will abstract from the problem of the limitation of ethics and hence from the problem of guilt and sin. In the appendix to this chapter we will see that Kant and Kierkegaard understand the problem in an analogous way.

⁹⁴ *Either/Or II* expresses a similar view: 'What he [the individual at the ethical stage] wants to actualise is certainly himself, but it is his ideal self, which he cannot acquire anywhere but within himself' (II 233 / SKS 3, 247).

(IV 289 / SKS 4, 324). The morally good for Plato/Socrates⁹⁵ and Aristotle always at least partly implies a person's welfare and happiness. Hence neither of these makes the principle of morality self-sufficient or fully independent of these factors. Despite the 'nobility' and subtlety of their conceptions, the good and hence its principle does not escape the status of being 'good for me' in the sense of being *beneficial* to me. In principle, this conception of the good has only relative status, is not independent of its outcome or its consequences, and remains indistinguishable from the good as characteristic of hypothetical imperatives. This has to be kept in mind. Although Kierkegaard borrows and refers to Greek concepts much more than he explicitly refers to Kantian ones, his conception of the ethical stage is systematically on the side of *Kant's* conception and not of Plato's or Aristotle's.⁹⁶ It is the rigour of ideality as an ethical task and consequently the abandonment of any aesthetic factor in the ethical that Kierkegaard time and again emphasises. 'Ethics does not lend itself to debate, for it has pure categories. It does not appeal to experience, which of all ridiculous things is about the most ridiculous' (III 134).⁹⁷

⁹⁵ From an analysis of Kierkegaard's relation to Socrates in *The Concept of Irony* we may conclude that (following Hegel) Kierkegaard's conception of what it means to be a moral agent is in principle on the side of Kant's conception and not that of Socrates'. Despite Kierkegaard's acknowledgement of Socrates' turning away from the Sophists, it is his overall conviction that (as implicitly opposed to Kantian ethics) Socrates does not arrive at a *positive* determination of the good (cf. Kierkegaard's whole discussion of the daimonion (XIII 242 ff. / SKS 1, 207 ff.)) or a positive determination of the universal (cf. for example XIII 310 / SKS 1, 275) and remains trapped in irony. Correspondingly the infinite which is characteristically implicit in the ethical shows itself as a *refracted* infinite and is not affirmed.

⁹⁶ A similar point is made against Hegelian ethics (or at least a certain reading of Hegelian ethics). In *Either/Or II* he says: 'When the ethical becomes more concrete, it crosses over into the category of custom [*Sæder*]: But in this respect the reality of it lies in the reality of a national individuality, and here the ethical has already assimilated an aesthetic moment' (II 229 / SKS 3, 243). The Hongts translate this word with 'morals', but this is a misleading translation which is unaware of the Hegelian distinction between *Sittlichkeit* (custom) and *Moralität*.

⁹⁷ In the case of *Either/Or II* the fictional Judge William responds to a person called 'A' and A's aesthetic view of life. Strictly speaking, Judge William's own position is a non-position. The kind of ethical existence he exemplifies is finally too complicated to be capable of being traced back to one single philosopher. He is so to speak a fully fledged human being with characteristics which must be regarded as contradictory, at least from a theoretical perspective. It is my conviction, however, that the longer he *reflects about* his life view, the more he reveals a deeply Kantian inheritance. *Either/Or II* increasingly becomes Kantian. To show this exhaustively would transcend the scope of the present investigation. However, it has to be acknowledged that in 'The

Problema I of Fear and Trembling sets up the tension between an ethical life and Abraham's faith specifically in respect of the teleological suspension of the ethical. The following passage serves to indicate Kierkegaard's identification of the ethical with the general or universal.⁹⁸ At the same time the end-in-itself formula of the categorical imperative comes to the fore as being a crucial dimension of what counts as morally good according to Kierkegaard:

The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it applies at all times. It rests immanent in itself, has nothing outside itself that is its telos (end, purpose) but is itself the telos⁹⁹ for everything outside itself, and when the ethical has absorbed this into itself, it goes not further (III 104 / SKS 4, 148).

The command of the categorical imperative to treat oneself and others always as ends in themselves and not as a mere means to an end is implicitly expressed here. To relate to someone as an end in itself implies adopting an end which is *set* by the command of the categorical imperative *itself* and hence 'the ethical rests in itself'. Any end which is not set in such an *a priori* way, but which is given with regard to our *a posteriori* incentives (whereby the corresponding command becomes conditional) is 'outside' the ethical. Any end which is not in agreement with an ethical end must be understood as being on the other side of the complete universality of the ethical command characteristic of the categorical imperative. It is the task of the ethical to 'absorb' any end which is not an ethical end. At the same time this means that it is the task of the ethical to absorb any attitude and its corresponding action which is not in agreement with the strict univer-

Balance Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality' (II 14–299 / SKS 3, 153–314) William also tries to introduce an aesthetic element into the ethical and sometimes believes in a 'happy coincidence' between the two. However, since it is precisely that which Kierkegaard according to later pronouncements wants to abandon with respect of the ethical, I do not refer mainly to *Either/Or II*. Wilfried Greve's book, *Kierkegaard's maieutische Ethik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1990, contains a very good summary of all the different philosophical (especially Hegelian) influences in Judge William's life view.

⁹⁸ I cannot give *all* the quotes where Kierkegaard express this identification. However, I want nevertheless to mention that each of the main chapters of this book (*Problema I, II, III*) which will be interpreted in the following pages *begins immediately* with the straightforward claim that the ethical is the universal (III 104 / SKS 4, 148; 117 / SKS 4, 160; 130 / SKS 4, 172).

⁹⁹ The same position comes to the fore in *Either/Or II*: 'Only within himself does the individual have the objective toward which he is to strive, and yet he has this objective outside himself as he strives toward it' (II 232 / SKS 3, 246 f.).

salinity of the moral law. To fulfil the ethical demand clearly means to let one's principles be determined by that which is universal.

With this background we can begin to make sense of the first sentences of *Problema II* of *Fear and Trembling*. In this section Kierkegaard contrasts the ethical life with Abraham's faith by pulling apart doing one's duty to one's neighbour from one's duty to God. There one reads:

The ethical is the universal, and as such it is also the divine. Thus it is proper to say that every duty is essentially a duty to God, but if no more can be said than this, then it is also said that I actually have no duty to God. The duty becomes duty by being traced back to God, but in the duty itself I do not enter into relation to God. For example, it is a duty to love one's neighbour. It is a duty by its being traced back to God, but in the duty I enter into relation not to God but to the neighbour I love. If in this connection I then say that it is my duty to love God, I am actually pronouncing only a tautology, inasmuch as God in a totally abstract sense is here understood as the divine – that is, the universal, that is the duty (III 117 / SKS 4, 160).¹⁰⁰

It is the duty to fulfil the moral law that Kierkegaard identifies with God. Hence to 'trace back' the corresponding duty of morality (of doing the good) to God means to trace back the duty to the duty. This means: do your duty because it is your duty. Hence the ethical is conceived of in a Kantian way as arising from duty.¹⁰¹ Understood in this way the 'duty to God' expresses nothing more than the duty to the duty. It is, as Kierkegaard rightly concludes, tautological and can only stand for an abstract relation to God, i. e. no real relation to God.¹⁰² To trace the duty back to the duty means to oblige oneself unconditionally to the duty (as the good). The ethical is an unconditional law

¹⁰⁰ In the following sentence Kierkegaard says: 'The whole existence of the human race rounds itself off as a perfect, self-contained sphere, and then the ethical is that which limits and fills at one and the same time' (II 117 / SKS 4, 160). I do not think that the later Hegel could agree with this view. Even his fully developed ethics in *The Philosophy of Right* does not denote a 'self-contained sphere' in and of itself and turns into the philosophy of absolute Spirit. This view is not only supported by the way in which Kierkegaard refers to ethics, but also consistent with his criticism of the Hegelian teleological conception of philosophy of history being primarily concerned with the 'result' (III 112 f. / SKS 4, 156), as well as by the fact that it is (as far as Kierkegaard knows – he did not know some writings of the *early* Hegel) Kant, not Hegel (cf. III 105 / SKS 4, 149), who claims that Abraham is a murderer (*Conflict of the Faculties*) and who may therefore be Kierkegaard's main opponent.

¹⁰¹ There is no reason to think that it is acting in accordance with duty or with a certain custom that Kierkegaard conceives of as being characteristic of the ethical. If one asserts – and there is some evidence for this assertion – that Hegel's conception of ethics as *Sittlichkeit* is not free from such a dimension of thinking, then one must confess once more that Kierkegaard is closer to Kant than to Hegel in this respect.

or the universal. This corresponds to saying that the ethical has its telos in itself or is an end in itself as Kierkegaard asserted in the passage at the beginning of *Problema I* as discussed above.

Like Kant, Kierkegaard is well aware that the ethical, tantamount to the universal, does not allow any exceptions. Consequently, he repeatedly makes it clear that Abraham must be conceived of as a murderer if the ethical stage of existence cannot at all be transcended. Either Abraham is a murderer or the religious stage of existence, which would allow an exception, is possible. From the viewpoint of ethics and its corresponding universality, however, any exception which is not in accordance with the moral law is not allowed.¹⁰³ By failing to do anything for the universal, Abraham falls outside of it and thereby becomes an exception.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² One may object that Kierkegaard cannot really refer to the categorical imperative since he talks about the *love* of neighbour and the *love* of God whereas the categorical imperative seems not to command love. Note, however, that Kierkegaard like Kant (cf. *Groundwork*, 399) is convinced that the duty to love cannot mean to oblige oneself to have the corresponding *inclination*. More importantly, Kierkegaard does not elucidate what he means by the duty to love apart from the fact that it has to arise from duty and that it is hence abstract. But to describe the duty to love in this way is not alien to the Kantian position. Accordingly Kant understands the biblical command 'to love our neighbour' in *Groundwork* as a 'beneficence from duty' which he designates as 'practical ... love' (G 399).

¹⁰³ Accordingly, Kant stresses in the *Conflict of the Faculties* (as well as in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*) that Abraham would be a murderer if he were to kill his son and thereby a forbidden exception from the ethical universality. As we will see in the remaining chapters, Kierkegaard's thinking of the religious and the Christian stage of existence must be understood as trying to 'think' against this paradigm, as trying to think the exception or particular without, however, denouncing it as exemplifying an existential failure altogether.

¹⁰⁴ It is by means of this kind of self-sufficient universality that the human being becomes actual. Here, Kierkegaard implicitly takes on board Kant's claim about the objectivity of the categorical imperative. Typically Kant focuses on the objective validity of the law, whereas Kierkegaard focuses on the objective validity or actuality of the self insofar it imposes this law on her subjectivity. However, these two different accentuations belong to one and the same conception of ethics. Only insofar as we adopt this kind of generality is it possible to get hold of what can count as being actual. Concreteness is not gained by adopting attitudes and practices which we find in the world outside us. On the contrary, the view that orients itself by reference to what it supposes to be concrete is in fact abstract according to Kierkegaard: 'That is, if the individual believes that the universal human being lies outside him, so that it will come to him from the outside, then he is disoriented, then he has an abstract conception, and his method will always be an abstract annihilating of the original self' (II 259 / SKS 3, 247).

In *Problema III of Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard sets up the tension between the ethical and Abraham's faith as the problem of giving an open justification for one's behaviour versus not being able to justify it in terms that others understand. One reads: 'The ethical as such is the universal; as the universal it is in turn the disclosed. The single individual, qualified as immediate, sensate, and psychical, is the hidden. Thus his ethical task is to work himself out of his hiddenness, and to become disclosed in the universal' (III 130 / SKS 4, 172).

With Kierkegaard's claim that the ethical is the universal, we are now in a position to see more generally how Kierkegaard proposes to bring ideality and reality into agreement. As I have indicated earlier, epistemologically speaking, truth first of all consists formally in an agreement between ideality (judgement) and reality (objects). With respect to knowledge of nature such an agreement, if it is to be more than a mere approximation, is impossible, according to Kierkegaard. However, ethically speaking, an agreement between ideality and reality can be understood differently and becomes possible for the first time for Kierkegaard. It consists here in an agreement between the ideal self conceived of as the universal task, with the real or immediate self belonging so to speak to the world of the senses.¹⁰⁵ Insofar as the latter is in agreement with the former in such a way that it is 'disclosed in the universal', the immediate self is justified, because it is brought into line with the universal task and its corresponding law. If such agreement is realised, the truth of the self¹⁰⁶ becomes possible. Indeed, we begin to understand the first crucial expression of truth with respect to Kierkegaard's stages. It denotes the agreement between the two dimensions of existence. Reality and ideality agree with each other if and only if reality or our immediate self is disclosed in the universal. This is identical with Kierkegaard's repeated claim that the ethical is the universal. Insofar as the human being can count as a moral agent her actions are disclosed and are in com-

¹⁰⁵ As far as I can see this is Kierkegaard's overall conception of truth with regard to what we ought to do which I will make more explicit in the following chapters.

¹⁰⁶ To be sure, for Kant nothing like the truth of the self exists which he makes very clear in the chapter on the paralogisms of pure reason. Furthermore, it is strictly speaking only judgements that can be true or false according to Kant whereas for Kierkegaard truth is possible within the practical or with regard to what we ought to do. Despite this difference, this and the next chapter will show to what extent Kierkegaard's conception of the ethical and the religious stages rely on basic characteristics of Kant's ethics.

plete agreement with the universal. Correspondingly, the will's maxim is in accordance with the universal law of the categorical imperative.¹⁰⁷

With this in mind, I want to focus on the respect in which Kierkegaard's conception of the ethical life-view is in accordance with the other main characteristic of the categorical imperative, namely its rationality.¹⁰⁸ As we have seen, the universality of the categorical imperative denotes at the same time its rationality according to Kant. Kant's ethics obliges us to adopt attitudes and their corresponding actions that are capable of being universalised, 'disclosed in the universal' as Kierkegaard puts it. Accordingly, the categorical imperative is a principle which urges us to act in such a way that our underlying will can be conceived of as an instance of a purely general order. Only if

¹⁰⁷ The agreement or accordance of one's immediate will/self with the ideal will/self (the categorical imperative) conceived of as a universal task emphasises the *objective* aspect of morality according to Kant. If the will is not in accordance with this law as the categorical imperative, then it cannot possibly be a moral will. As we have seen Kierkegaard agrees with this view. However, such accordance is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition of morality. As alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, we must will the good in such a way that we will it for its own sake. In other words, we must act *from* duty. Such acting from duty denotes the *subjective* aspect of morality according to Kant without which a moral action would be impossible. I will expand on this issue in the next chapter in a more detailed way. Let me nevertheless mention already that there certainly is no disagreement with Kierkegaard in regard to the subjective aspect of morality. An ethical agent constitutes herself not *only* in virtue of simply being in accordance with the universal (as the categorical imperative). The self or will as a (self conscious) synthesis of reality and ideality is a true self, if the how of the relation is in truth – as Kierkegaard generally stresses in the *Postscript* with respect to subjective reflection (that is, the domain of the will): 'When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual's relation is reflected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth' (VII 166 / SKS 7, 182). The 'how' to which Kierkegaard refers characterises the subjective or motivational aspect of a moral action and as we will see more clearly in the next chapter, the how is in truth if it denotes an act from duty (cf. 5.3.1.). Towards the end of the next chapter, however, we will come to see that in respect to the religious stage Kierkegaard puts weight on the subjective aspect of a practical orientation to such an extent that the objective aspect (the accordance with the universal as practical reason) vanishes.

¹⁰⁸ I do not refer here to *Either/Or II* in order to show that the ethical can be identified with the rational since this is not affirmed by Kierkegaard explicitly. However, it is obvious, I think, that Judge William does not really have to emphasise this since he is in some sense *the incarnation of* the rational and that which can be thought and hence judged. He is a Judge in the strictest sense of the word. He derives maxims and their corresponding actions from the law. To 'render a verdict' (VI 131 / SKS 6, 218) as expressed in *Stages on Life's Way*, reflects his innermost being.

one can derive a particular will or maxim of an action from the unconditional law of the categorical imperative, is it then possible to refer to this will as a moral will. Since Kierkegaard's conception of the ethical as the *universal* can be understood as Kantian, it follows immediately that it can also be understood as sharing *its* embodiment of rationality.

The practical derivation of a will from the categorical imperative, which Kant identifies with practical reason, must, as we have seen, be capable of being reflected theoretically. The practical derivation must correspond to a theoretical inference. In other words, a practical derivation must be capable of being theoretically reasonable. Inferring takes place within the medium or realm of judgements. Insofar as we infer, our mind infers from one judgement (in respect of the categorical imperative) to another judgement (in respect of a maxim or subjective principle of volition). A will must be capable of being reasonable in the sense that we must be capable of inferring from the corresponding former assertion to the corresponding latter. Now, it is the concept of *mediation*¹⁰⁹ that reflects such a theoretical inference in *Fear and Trembling*. Let us cite from *Fear and Trembling* in order to elucidate this point: '[A]ll mediation takes place only by virtue of the universal' (III 106 / SKS 4, 150). 'As soon as I speak, I express the universal, and if I do not do so, no one can understand me' (III 110 / SKS 4, 153). 'You must acknowledge the universal, and you acknowledge it specifically by speaking' (III 157 / SKS 4, 199).

A moral will can indeed be mediated by virtue of the universal, because we can theoretically infer from a statement in respect of the categorical imperative to a statement in respect of the will. Such inference takes place within the medium of *language*, that is, within the medium of judgements. What we should do can be represented within the realm of what we know, that is, inferred with reference to the (presupposed) knowledge of what the categorical imperative consists in. We mediate it by authority of universality.¹¹⁰ In *this* sense a moral maxim can be *acknowledged* in respect of the universal law by language or judgement.

¹⁰⁹ Even though the term 'mediation' is a Hegelian concept, it can be related to Kant's conception of reason. Whereas mediation, as we saw in Chapter 2, connects the subject with the object of *experience*, mediation here connects the subject with the object of the categorical imperative in the *noumenal* sphere. In both cases the connection consists in an *a priori* inference between the subject and the object.

¹¹⁰ In respect of the Christian stage, we will see that it is precisely the complete impossibility of thinking (mediating) and the impossibility of direct communication which characterises this kind of authentic existence. It is because of that impossibility that Kierkegaard develops indirect ways of thinking and communicating.

As shown above, from the practical viewpoint (concerning the objective aspect of morality) the will is in truth if its maxim agrees with the law of the categorical imperative as a necessary condition. The viewpoint of objective reflection denotes the perspective of our theoretical attitude. It is this attitude in which mediation or making inferences takes place. Now, Kierkegaard expresses in the *Postscript* that the self is in truth *practically*, although we may arrive at an untruth theoretically – ‘*the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth*’ (VII 166 / SKS 7, 182). Since the ethical can be mediated, as Kierkegaard repeatedly affirms, we can now assert: insofar as we are ethical agents, we do *not* relate to untruth theoretically. We are both in truth practically and relate to truth theoretically since we can mediate what we ought to do by means of the universal law of the categorical imperative.

4.3 *The Problem of Justification and Choice in the Ethical*

How does Kant justify the categorical imperative? This is a highly complicated issue which cannot at all be discussed exhaustively here. In the second section of *Groundwork*, as discussed above, Kant takes the categorical imperative for granted and analyses its characteristic features and its different formulae. We have thereby seen that Kant’s *definition* of practical reason in the second section of *Groundwork* must be conceived of as circular. What it means to have a reasonable attitude is dependent upon the meaning of reason, but this latter meaning is itself based upon a presupposition.

In the end of the second section Kant maintains that this supreme principle cannot be separated from the idea of autonomy (‘the ... principle of autonomy is the sole principle of morals’ (G 440). Thereby Kant emphasises two crucial aspects of the categorical imperative. 1) The necessity to act independently from merely subjective (‘pathological’) interests and aims that arise from our *a posteriori* inclinations and that would turn this very necessity into an hypothetical imperative. 2) The necessity to act in virtue of universal self-legislation (*auto-nomy*). However, it is also a matter of mere *definition* to say that x (the categorical imperative) is defined in terms of y (autonomy), because the validity of autonomy cannot be proven either. Although we can, of course, define autonomy in terms of the categorical imperative and vice versa, we cannot show thereby the objective or actual validity of either of them. Therefore, Kant realises that this definitional circular-

ity does not *justify* the categorical imperative at all. However, he is aware of this fact. Besides emphasising how difficult any such justification is, he warns his readers that he will only justify it in the *third* section: '[H]ow such an absolute command is possible, even if we know its tenor, will still require special and difficult toil, which, however, we postpone to the last section' (G 421).

In this last section, although Kant announces several times that he will deduce the categorical imperative, this deduction is hardly capable of being convincing apart from the fact that Kant admits the (necessary) failure of justification with regard to a crucial aspect of moral actions. Therefore I would like to briefly mention some of the basic problems of Kant's deduction and then raise the question as to why it has to fail with regard to one of its aspects.¹¹¹

In the first paragraph of the third section of *Groundwork* Kant claims that 'a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same' (G 447). He contends that *if we take for granted* that a free will exists, then we conceive of this free will as being subordinated to the moral law. I will not deal here with all the implicit assumptions from Kant's theoretical philosophy that may support this view.¹¹² Instead I want to emphasise that such establishment of freedom and the moral law as 'reciprocal concepts' does not imply that *we as human beings* are justified to consider ourselves as free. It applies (or may apply) only to a being that *necessarily* acts according to the principle of morality. In this case the will to act morally *analytically* contains the moral law. For such a purely reasonable being (what Kant calls 'a holy will' cf. 4.2) the moral law does not have the character of an *imperative* and neither must it *oblige* itself to do the good. It does not have the choice between doing the morally good and not doing it or it does not stand at a crossroads as we do as the imperfect beings that we are. This precisely is the reason why, for the human will, the moral law is a *synthetic a priori* principle: It combines (and obliges) our will with the

¹¹¹ How exactly this failure emerges or shows itself is very interesting, but I must stress that I cannot discuss this issue fully since this book cannot be concerned with the details of the Kantian investigation. This means at the same time that I cannot refer in detail to the concepts of interest and freedom which play a crucial role in Kant's attempt to justify the categorical imperative. For an excellent analysis of this problem, however, see Henry E. Allison *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, pp. 201–249.

¹¹² Schönecker/Wood *Kant's Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, pp. 178 ff., give a good summary of Kant's presuppositions from the *Critique of Pure Reason* as well as an excellent discussion of what they call the *Analytizitätsthese* in the first paragraph of the third section of *Groundwork*.

a priori moral law. But an analysis of *our* will does not necessarily imply this very law since *we* can certainly act in non-moral ways. We have to synthesize our will with the moral law since we do not arrive at it by means of mere analysis of our finite will.¹¹³ Therefore Kant's claim that freedom and morality imply one another, apart from being itself dubious, does not establish the (possibility of the) objective validity of either of these concepts for us as finite human beings. With respect to a holy will Kant defines freedom in such a way that it is tantamount to the moral law. This may be legitimate, but as soon as he claims this with regard to *our* will, the 'argument' certainly lacks validity. However, if Kant is capable of finding an independent argument for the validity of freedom with regard to our will, then at least the possibility for us to act according to the categorical imperative will be grounded in reason or will be justified. The choice for willing the good as defined by the moral law can be justified as a rational choice, if the reality of the concept of freedom correctly applies to us. However, this will still leave open the question as to why we *should* act in such a way that may be possible and reasonable.

In the next two paragraphs of the third section of *Groundwork* Kant does try to find evidence that freedom is a justifiable possibility for human beings. Accordingly, these passages are concerned with a justification of the possibility of moral actions. The second paragraph contains a rather strong argument for the validity of freedom with regard to *theoretical* reason: 'Now, one cannot possibly think of a reason that would consciously receive direction from any other quarter with respect to its judgments, since the subject would attribute the determination of his judgment not to his reason but to an impulse.' (G 448)¹¹⁴ In other words, reason as the capacity to think or to judge cannot be unfree because the person who asserts that freedom is impossible in

¹¹³ The categorical imperative is 'a practical proposition that does not derive the volition of an action analytically from another volition already presupposed (for we have not such perfect will), but connects it immediately with the concept of the will of a rational being as something that is not contained in it' (G 420 fn).

¹¹⁴ In Kant's *Recension von Schulz's Versuch einer Anleitung zur Sittenlehre* from 1783, he makes this argument more explicit when he attacks the determinist Schulz in the following way: 'Er hat aber im Grunde seiner Seele, obgleich er es sich selbst nicht gestehen wollte, voraus gesetzt: dass der Verstand nach objectiven Gründen, die jederzeit gültig sind, sein Urtheil zu bestimmen das Vermögen habe und nicht unter dem Mechanismus der blos subjectiv bestimmenden Ursachen, die sich in der Folge ändern können, stehe; mithin nahm er immer Freiheit zu denken an, ohne welche es keine Vernunft gibt.' Cited according to Schönecker/Wood *Kant's Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, p.185.

one way or another takes freedom for granted by making this very assertion. What the determinist asserts, namely that freedom is impossible, is contradicted by the performative force of the act of asserting which involves the presupposition of freedom and hence leads to performative contradiction. However, Kant immediately concludes from freedom with regard to theoretical reason to freedom with regard to practical reason, that is, the capacity to will and act in a free way: '[C]onsequently, as practical reason or as the will of a rational being it must be regarded of itself as free, that is, the will of such a being cannot be a will of his own except under the idea of freedom, and such a will must in a practical respect thus be attributed to every rational being' (G 448). The force of this conclusion, however, is not supported by good arguments. It seems that Kant 'simply' takes for granted the unity of reason with respect to its theoretical and practical employment as he had already announced in the preface of *Groundwork* (G 391). How can we derive the freedom of willing from the freedom of thinking? The references to the first *Critique* in the third paragraph of the *Groundwork* do not make legitimate this very transition either. Rather, they give evidence of the fact that the human being is entitled to consider herself as theoretically free *in virtue of the spontaneity of her thinking*. Correspondingly, Kant contends that the first *Critique* has demonstrated that although we live within the world of senses we belong at the same time to the intelligible sphere of spontaneity. We are independent of the former and hence not determined by *its* paradigm of cause and effect (causality of nature). Such (as Kant believes: a necessary) distinction between the noumenal world and the phaenomenal world provides an elaborate basis for us to hold on to the idea of theoretical freedom, namely in virtue of that very capacity which constitutes the noumenal world. Therefore the abstract argument in the second paragraph (that *one* cannot judge oneself to be unfree unless *one* commits to a performative contradiction) gains concreteness by showing that acts of judgement are rooted in the spontaneous capacity of our mind being independent from a causality of nature. In other words, the implicit assumption in paragraph 2 that we as human beings are capable of being reasonable theoretically (and can hence argue for the validity of theoretical freedom) is made explicit in paragraph 3 by showing on what grounds this is the case with respect to human beings. But in no way does it give further evidence for the claim that freedom pertains to our will.

Since Kant does not give an argument for practical freedom, we can conclude that he does not have an argument in support of the choice

to act according to the moral law. The possibility of such choice is not justified. Now, let us nevertheless grant Kant that the concept of freedom correctly applies to our will and not only to the freedom of our thinking. It nevertheless is only the *possibility* of acting according to the moral law that is then justified. Our will, of course, is still of such a kind that it stands at the crossroads. Why then *should* we choose the moral path and not the immoral one even if the former is possible and justifiable? Our will does not *necessarily* act in a moral way as does the holy will. What is the reason for *obligating* myself to will according to the moral law even if I assume that the possibility of such willing is justifiable? Where is the final justifying ground for such synthesis *a priori*? We may be allowed to consider ourselves as free and *insofar* as this is the case, we act in a moral way (according to paragraph one of the third section). But, again, what is the reason for the self-obligation for such acts? We may be free and hence moral if we will accordingly, but why *should* we do so?

It is this question, I think, that Kant seeks to answer in the fourth paragraph of the third section of *Groundwork*. Unfortunately this paragraph is extremely obscure and allows for many possible readings. However, it is rather clear that he grounds the moral law as the categorical *imperative* pertaining to human beings in the very fact that the will, insofar as it belongs to the intelligible world, is ontologically superior to the will insofar as it belongs to the phenomenal world.¹¹⁵

But because the world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense, and so too of its laws, and is therefore immediately lawgiving with respect to my will (which belongs wholly to the world of understanding) ... the laws of the world of understanding must be regarded as imperatives for me, and actions in conformity with these as duties (G 453 f.).

Apart from the fact that Kant once again does not legitimise the transition from the thinking subject to the willing subject, this claim is hardly convincing to us. It seems to rest in an ontological presupposition of the superiority of *ens noumena* which is highly problematic and speculative.

Let us then sum up the discussion in this way: it is *not contrary* to reason to hold on to the actuality of practical freedom. But this of course does not demonstrate its objective validity and hence does not positively justify the categorical imperative. The only thing that would justify the categorical imperative would be the *reality* of the concept,

¹¹⁵ Schönecker/Wood call this priority an 'ontoethischen Grundsatz', op. cit., p. 197.

i. e., the knowledge that the concept (of practical freedom) correctly applies to us, but not, however, the concept alone. The concept alone leads to a circularity in justification: x (the categorical imperative) is there, because of y (freedom) and vice versa. But even if the reality of the concept correctly applies to us, the justification of the categorical imperative is not completed according to Kant. It is still a question why we must oblige our 'crossroad-will' to one of its alternatives. Whether this alternative is possible and grounded in reason is not satisfactorily answered by Kant.

Perhaps being aware of all these difficulties, Kant finally comes to the conclusion in the fifth paragraph of the third section of *Groundwork* that there is no way of *positively* justifying the validity of practical freedom and hence the categorical imperative, although he – rightly – emphasises that their invalidity cannot be claimed to be proven either: 'Now where determination of laws of nature ceases, there all *explanation* ceases as well, and nothing is left but defense, that is to repel the objections of those who pretend to have seen deeper into the essence of things and therefore boldly declare that freedom is impossible' (G 459). Strictly speaking, however, he refers here to a peculiar concept of 'explanation', namely to the question of *how* the moral law, and with it its necessary assumption of practical freedom, can 'put into action' an action from duty or an action from moral interest, both expressions being tantamount to the peculiar feeling of respect (for the moral law). This feeling could only be *explained* by a possible object of experience. But since it must have an intelligible cause, it cannot be explained. 'For, how a law can be of itself and immediately an determining ground of the will (though this is essential in all morality) is for human reason an insoluble problem and identical with that of how a free will is possible' (CPR 5:72). At the very end of *Groundwork* Kant admits that he could not explain and in this sense justify the categorical imperative or freedom. However, he makes an interesting point concerning the impossibility of any such justification. I will quote this extensively since the corresponding conception or idea will turn out to be close to the Kierkegaardian account and will reappear in a similar way in the later stages of existence:

It is ... an ... essential limitation of reason that it can see neither the necessity of what is and what happens nor the necessity of what ought to happen unless a condition under which it is and happens or ought to happen is put at the basis of this. ... [Although human reason] restlessly seeks the unconditionally necessary, [it is] constrained to assume it without any means of making it comprehensible to itself, fortunate enough, if it can discover only the concept [the concept of the categorical imperative] that is compatible

with this presupposition. ... for that it is unwilling to do this [justification or deduction of the categorical imperative] through a condition – namely by means of some interest laid down as a basis – cannot be held against it, since then it would not be the moral law, that is, the supreme law of freedom. And thus we do not indeed comprehend the practical unconditional necessity of the moral imperative, but we nevertheless comprehend its incomprehensibility; and this is all that can fairly be required of a philosophy that strives in its principles to the very boundary of human reason (G 463).

The unconditional goodness of the good will is determined by a principle which must itself have the status of being unconditional. However, as an unconditional principle the categorical imperative cannot be explained because any such explanation would base the categorical imperative upon a condition (as a possible object of experience) and hence would make it conditional. If we had to found the moral law upon a ('pathological') interest or an external condition as a possible object of experience, then we would repeal the inner unconditionality of this law. Correspondingly, our actions would not have their *origin* in the principle of the moral law. Therefore one can say that it is necessary that the moral law cannot be based upon any further necessity, that it is necessary that it cannot be rooted in anything but human freedom and hence the capacity for a 'new beginning'. Accordingly we cannot understand the validity of the categorical imperative as being explainable because the concept of freedom cannot be an object of knowledge in the strict sense. We can only understand that we cannot understand it.

Finally we can come to the conclusion that we cannot justify the assertion that acting from duty, as being characteristic of moral actions, arises from the categorical imperative and that moral worth is based upon *this* principle. Kant does not give us enough evidence which would justify the categorical imperative. He does not convince us why moral goodness should be identified with the capacity of reason. Accordingly he does not justify why an unconditionally good will (being determined by a principle) must be understood as being rational. Why must we equate the dictum, 'it is unconditionally good to do x' with 'it is unconditionally reasonable to do x'? Why must 'to act from duty' be understood in this peculiar way? For Kant – coming from the tradition of early modern rationalism – it seems obvious that morality must have this internal connection with reason. Morality cannot be random. Hence we must not allow it to have its roots in the empirical realm of *a posteriori* incentives. *Therefore* we must let it originate in the realm of reason in order to give it a secure and stable basis and, as a consequence, the human being becomes split into two parts, into the empirical self and the noumenal self.

Where does this all leave us? We have seen that Kant is incapable of justifying the categorical imperative and furthermore that it cannot, of necessity, be explained since it cannot depend upon any further condition. A reason (or 'pathological' interest) being external to this law would devalue its moral worth and hence we can only conceive of the inconceivability of the categorical imperative. Willing the good in accordance with the categorical imperative may *display* a rational will, but there is (necessarily) no necessity or rational requirement to *move to* morality or the good will and its corresponding principle. We may be reasonable *insofar as* our good will obliges us to be rational, but the motivation *to commit to* this kind of rationality remains unjustifiable or pre-rational.

As we have seen Kierkegaard repeatedly identifies the ethical with the universal in *Fear and Trembling*. Only if the individual attitude is disclosed in, agrees with, and can be mediated with the universal, is it also an ethical attitude. Although Kierkegaard neither gives a philosophical articulation of the problem of freedom nor stresses that to be an ethical agent presupposes freedom, I think that it is obvious that he takes this for granted.¹¹⁶ Is it not impossible to conceive of the ethical demand otherwise, that is, without reference to human freedom? However, how is the ethical as the universal at all justified *itself* according to Kierkegaard? Basically the Dane makes no attempt to argue this point. The problem of the justification of the ethical life-view in *Fear and Trembling* is not even raised. Nevertheless Kierkegaard agrees with Kant that a free and moral will cannot rest upon a condition or a 'pathological' interest. It cannot be explained in terms of a possible object of knowledge and we would repeal the very unconditionality of the moral demand if we did. Accordingly Kierkegaard holds in the *Concept of Anxiety*:

We have said what we again repeat, that sin presupposes itself, just as freedom presupposes itself and sin cannot be explained by anything antecedent to it, any more than can freedom. To maintain that freedom begins as *liberum arbitrium* ... that can choose

¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Alastair Hannay *Kierkegaard*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd 1982, p. 231, is right when he insists that for Kierkegaard 'in another sense freedom is not just an assumption [...], it is a project for the individual. Or rather, the project an individual has of *becoming* an individual, or a self, in the strict sense'. Hermann Deuser expresses a similar view in his *Kierkegaard: Die Philosophie des religiösen Schriftstellers*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1985, pp. 136 ff. However, this, I think, is a Kierkegaardian *elaboration* of Kant's ethics which is primarily interested in the nature and presuppositions of a moral action as such and not so much in how the self becomes transformed into a moral/religious/Christian self.

good just as well as evil inevitably makes every explanation impossible. To speak of good and evil as the objects of freedom finitizes both freedom and the concepts of good and evil. Freedom is infinite and arises out of nothing (IV 380 f.).

Judge William, Kierkegaard's chief representative of the ethical stage in *Either/Or II*, writes: 'What is this self of mine? If I were to speak of a first moment, a first expression for it, then my answer is this: It is the most abstract of all, and yet in itself it is the most concrete of all – it is freedom' (II 214 / SKS 3, 205).¹¹⁷ Accordingly, a human being gains history 'only when it is my personal deed in such a way that even that which has happened to me is transformed and transferred from necessity to freedom' (II 250 / SKS 3, 239). Also, Judge William is very much aware of the fact that the foundation of morality (and with it the foundation of an identification of morality and reason) cannot itself be justified. To will the good involves a kind of willing or decision which cannot be finally justified.

How does the Kierkegaardian 'non-justification' of the ethical relate to the corresponding justification of morality in *Groundwork* in particular? As we have seen in the previous chapter (3.1) it is neither for Kant nor for Kierkegaard the case that *a posteriori* incentives *themselves* are capable of determining moral failure or double-mindedness. Only insofar as they have been *actively* and freely incorporated into the will's maxim can the corresponding conduct be called morally 'bad'. Kant does not give any description of what this pre-moral state of mind may consist. According to Kant, we either incorporate the *a posteriori* incentives or we adopt the moral principle, but we cannot stay within the realm of the *merely* aesthetic *without* choosing. According to Kant, we have always already decided for a morally good or a morally bad maxim. We must choose and we cannot remain in the state of not choosing. Judge William's theory on this issue in *Either/Or II*, however, is different when he says: '[T]he aesthetic is not evil but the indifferent' (II 153 / SKS 3, 165). Indeed the aesthetic as the indifferent seems not to have anything to do with choice and hence responsibility: '[T]he person who lives aesthetically does not choose' (II 152 / SKS 3, 168).

Since the merely aesthetic seems to be a possible life-position according to Kierkegaard in *Either/Or II*, it becomes understandable that he asserts that (speaking in Kantian terminology) before we either allow the *a posteriori* incentives to be incorporated or let ourselves be

¹¹⁷ Correspondingly, Kierkegaard expresses in *The Sickness Unto Death*: 'The self is freedom' (XI 142).

determined by the principle of morality, we have to decide whether we want to be on this side of this choice *at all*, whether *we want to* have the choice between morality and immorality *at all*. Willing either the good or the bad presupposes a choice between willing to will the good *and* the bad (and *then* willing the good or the bad), and not willing to will the good and the bad and hence remaining in the realm of the aesthetic. According to Kierkegaard's 'B', willing the good or the bad presupposes a fundamental choice as to whether we want this former (Kantian) choice *at all*: 'Rather than designating the choice between good and evil, my Either/Or designates the choice by which one chooses good and evil or rules them out' (II 153 / SKS 3, 165). '[T]he point is still not that of choosing something; the point is not the reality of that which is chosen but the reality of choosing' (II 160 / SKS 3, 172). 'The Either/Or I have advanced is, therefore, in a certain sense absolute, for it is between choosing and not choosing' (II 161 / SKS 3, 173).¹¹⁸ In sum, moral conduct is rooted in a choice to will the good and the bad. To choose the good and the bad is a necessary condition of the ethical. In order to justify the ethical we must justify this prior choice *and* additionally justify the choice to will the good.

As I have indicated, this basic and prior decision of our will is not considered by Kant. We cannot choose or will to will the good *and* the bad or – the other alternative – neither of them (the merely aesthetic). According to Kant, we have to decide whether we want the good or the bad, but we cannot decide and will whether we want to be on this side of the choice at all. Even if we grant this seeming difference, it is at this point where we can, again, discern an analogy. We have seen above that Kant's reasoning of justifying the principle of morality as the categorical imperative is not very convincing. Furthermore, he admits the (necessary) failure of explaining how this principle can induce a power as a motivating force or a moral interest in order to do the good for its own sake. There is nothing which justifies or explains the movement towards adopting an unconditional good will determined by this principle with regard to our moral motivation. It is inconceivable how the

¹¹⁸ Not willing the good and the bad is a feature of romanticism as Kierkegaard sees it. It is a way of creating reality rather than accepting the reality or actuality that is hers and treating it as a task. The task side brings with it the 'real' distinction between good and bad. For a treatment of Kierkegaard's critique of romanticism, see the excellent article by K. Brian Söderquist 'The Religious Suspension of the Ethical and the Ironic Suspension of the Ethical: The Problem of Actuality in *Fear and Trembling*', in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 2002*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 2002.

peculiar feeling of respect for the moral law itself is put into action by this very law. How the categorical imperative is possible or capable of being justified with regard to this subjective aspect of morality remains hidden. Consequently the choice to be a rational (moral) agent or not to be one is not or cannot be itself grounded in rationality from this viewpoint. For Kierkegaard, there is no justification whatsoever for the choice to will the good and neither is there a justification for the preceding choice to will the good and the bad that Kant does not take into account. Both are rooted in freedom and remain unexplainable. However, it would be wrong to assert that this Kierkegaardian conception of the ethical (and the unexplainable aspect of Kant's theory) annihilates the rational character of the ethical altogether. There is no contradiction in stressing that the *step towards* morality is not rational and hence infected with arbitrariness and in stressing that the ethical is *internally* rational.¹¹⁹ However, the 'choice' of the aesthete not to will the good and the bad, his persistence to remain within the merely aesthetic and to avoid the categories of the ethical is consistent enough. Why, after all, should he not avoid them?

That the merely aesthetic exists as a possible life-position and, correspondingly, that the basic either/or consists in either willing the good and the bad or in willing neither of them has been referred to as a *seeming* difference to the Kantian account so far. Here I would like to explain why there may finally be no fundamental difference between Kant's and Kierkegaard's conceptions. Does the realm of the apparently merely aesthetic really involve no choice in the sense that the person in it is not morally responsible for her attitude? Despite B's views on this matter (see quotes above), one has to ask whether the so-understood aesthetic does not rely on some kind of choice between good and bad. Is not *not* choosing to choose between choosing and not choosing *itself* an instance of choosing? Is it not a refusal to choose itself a choice? Conversely, the choice to be confronted with the choice between good and bad at all is considered to be a premoral choice by 'B', but can we really choose to be confronted with such kind of choice? Do we have the choice of having a choice? Is it not Kierkegaard's (and Kant's) *overall* position that we don't choose to be confronted with the choice, but when we are confronted with it, we have no alternative but to choose? There is no other book by Kierkegaard in which he again expresses B's apparent views on this issue.

¹¹⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue*, London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd 1999, pp. 39 f., makes this wrong conclusion with regard to Kierkegaard.

Even the text of *Either/Or II* itself is not at all clear. Does 'B' really believe in this theory of choice? Is not this belief rather due to the specific knowledge he has about 'A', namely that he knows that the sophisticated aesthete A as a matter of fact cannot be convinced by a rigorist ethical point of view? Does not B, *therefore*, explain both the aesthetic and choice to depart from it (morality) in non-moral terms? Finally, I would like to note that despite what B says explicitly – that the realm of the aesthetic cannot be evaluated within the paradigm of good and bad – it is exactly this which happens on a number of occasions. B does – in a secret and hidden way – time and again allude to the moral failures implicit in A's aesthetic way of life. Indeed this way of regarding the aesthetic is more in accordance with Kierkegaard's overall view on this issue which has been emphasised in Chapter 3 (3.1). No matter how deeply we are involved in the world of the senses – we are morally responsible for our corresponding attitude. That is, we incorporate *a posteriori* incentives and freely choose to be double-minded. Since we are free to choose or to will we can only comprehend the incomprehensibility of the ethical.

As we will see in the Appendix to this chapter, sinning is always based upon a free choice for which we must be held responsible. Since sin corresponds to double-mindedness it becomes difficult to hold that (as *Either/Or II* may suggest) another kind of double-mindedness, as the *merely* aesthetic, may exist for which we are not responsible.¹²⁰ However, finally, I think this issue remains unclear in respect of *Either/Or II*, because Kierkegaard does not make it clear.

Appendix

The Failure of the Ethical: Radical Evil and Original Sin

The subject of this book is Kierkegaard's relation to Kant's epistemology as well as Kant's ethics. As stated in the introduction, it is not my aim to try to treat every possible topic of interest related to Kant and Kierkegaard. However, the systematic approach of this investigation makes it inevitable that I refer to a problem which emerges at this point, namely the failure of the ethical stage and hence the problem of *evil*, *guilt* and *sin* in Kant and Kierkegaard.

¹²⁰ On the other hand one *may* argue that the merely aesthetic corresponds to unconscious despair whereas the aesthetic, being a result of the choice to will the good and the bad, may correspond to conscious despair as presented in *The Sickness Unto Death*.

From the subjective viewpoint of the individual who may move (or has moved) from the ethical to the *religious* stage, the failure to meet the ethical demand shows itself as guilt. From the viewpoint of *Christian* existence, which for Kierkegaard is the uppermost truth (as I discuss in the final chapter), such failure reveals itself as sin. Sin is the truth of guilt, but does not come to the fore until we meet the specifically Christian, as exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth, as the God-man.¹²¹ Whereas guilt, according to Kierkegaard, involves a consciousness of being unable to meet the *ethical* demand, sin involves a consciousness of being unable to meet (the Christian) *God's* command.

According to Kant, guilt as 'this original debt ... is what we understood by radical evil' (R 89). Radical evil is the 'propensity of the power of choice [freedom] to maxims that subordinate the incentives of the moral law to others (not moral ones)' (R 54); whereas he understands sin as 'the transgression of the moral law as *divine command*' (R 63). In short: evil is 'transgression of the moral law, called sin when the law is taken as divine command' (R 89). As we can see, Kierkegaard's and Kant's conceptions correspond to one another. That is, both thinkers articulate the failure to live up to ethical demands in basically one and the same way.

Keeping in mind that guilt/evil corresponds to sin, I now want to show that Kant's radical evil is analogous to Kierkegaard's original sin. Although these thinkers draw different conclusions from the presence of guilt/sin and the accompanying impossibility of fulfilling the ethical/God's command, they both share the same conception of what this failure consists of.¹²² According to Kant and Kierkegaard this failure is *inexplicable* and *absolute*.

According to Kant, a human being is evil only insofar as evil principles govern her practical attitude. It is not the sensuous drive in itself

¹²¹ Accordingly, Kierkegaard writes in the *Postscript*: 'The individual is ... unable to gain the consciousness of sin by himself, which is the case with guilt-consciousness, because in guilt consciousness the subject's self-identity is preserved, and guilt consciousness is a change of the subject within the subject himself. The consciousness of sin, however, is a change of the subject himself, which shows that outside the individual there must be the power that makes clear to him that he has become a person other than he was by coming into existence, that he has become a sinner. This power is the god in time' (VII 509).

¹²² The starting point for the Kantian view of this matter (which will be referred to only very briefly) is the first section of *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (R 45–73). The title of this section reads: 'Concerning the Indwelling of the Evil Principle with the Good, or, Of the Radical Evil in Human Nature' (R 45).

which is evil, ‘*except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim* (has made it the general rule in accordance with which he will conduct himself)’ (R 49).¹²³ At the same time this means that evil (like the categorical imperative) has its roots in human *freedom* and hence we are fully *responsible* for evil. But, as Kant had already noted in *Groundwork*, freedom cannot be explained. By analogy with the categorical imperative in respect to how it becomes a motivational force as an act from duty, it is only possible to ‘understand’ that we cannot actually understand. And so evil does indeed presuppose a final basis which cannot be deduced. And since this is the case, evil is *not understandable*. We cannot trace it back to any other condition or cause except our own freedom.

Since, according to Kant, human conduct is either completely good or completely bad and evil,¹²⁴ it follows that it determines a human being *absolutely* (‘*either-or*’). These two features of evil – its incomprehensibility and its absoluteness – play an essential part in Kierkegaard’s understanding and conception of sin. In the following short analysis of a few passages of *The Concept of Anxiety*, I want to show that the incomprehensibility of sin is at the heart of Kierkegaard’s conception of sin. I will not refer to the absoluteness and other characteristics of sin explicitly.¹²⁵

According to traditional Christian belief, Adam was originally created in the image of God. At a given point in time, sin came into the world and was passed on (and continues to be passed on) to later generations.¹²⁶ As has been pointed out in this chapter, it is fundamental for Kierkegaard’s (and for Kant’s) conception of ethical existence that the human being relates to the ethical requirement as the universal which applies to every human being. Now, original sin as the general human condition is that which prevents us from realising our eth-

¹²³ We saw this feature of Kant’s thinking in Chapter 3 which dealt with double-mindedness. Double-mindedness as the result of an incorporation of *a posteriori* incentives or a prudential attitude is based upon ‘freedom of choice’ (MM 213) and hence corresponds to an evil attitude.

¹²⁴ I am not sure, however, whether this view is a convincing way of conceiving of human life.

¹²⁵ Cf. Ronald M. Green *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, pp. 156–169.

¹²⁶ ‘According to traditional concepts, the difference between Adam’s first sin and the first sin of every other man is this: Adam’s sin conditions sinfulness as a consequence, the other first sin presupposes sinfulness as a state. Were this so, Adam would actually stand outside the race, and the race would not have begun with him, but would have had a beginning outside itself, something that is contrary to every concept’ (IV 302 / SKS 4, 336).

ical call. Against this background, we can understand why Kierkegaard claims that Adam finds himself in the same situation as every other human being: ‘Through the first sin, sin came into the world. Precisely in the same way it is true of every subsequent man’s first sin, that through it sin comes into the world’ (IV 303 / *SKS* 4, 337). But how does sin come into the world if not through a kind of chain of cause and effect initiated by Adam? It is impossible according to Kierkegaard, to base it upon an item that would explain sin causally. We are fully responsible for it and we must conceive of it as a presupposition (cf. IV 291 / *SKS* 4, 325 f.).

Sin’s very rootedness in human freedom helps us understand that there cannot be a further condition upon which we could base it. It is impossible to give any criterion under which sin becomes possible. There is nothing in our empirical incentives or in our ‘ontological’ situation which necessitates sin, according to Kierkegaard. So we understand that we cannot understand sin, and we do not understand why we sin again and again, why we freely choose to act immorally again and again. In other words: sin is paradoxical and in this general sense the paradox as a category is indicative of Kierkegaard’s thinking about ethical, religious and Christian existence since all of the corresponding attitudes are rooted in freedom (or, with respect to the Christian attitude, in the freedom to give up one’s freedom). With Kant we can once again conclude that ‘we do not indeed comprehend the practical unconditional necessity’ and only ‘comprehend its incomprehensibility’ (G 463).

I will discuss further aspects of the powerlessness of the understanding in (5.4) and in (6.2). I will show how our rational capacities become devaluated further when it comes to religious and Christian existence. As we will see this shows itself not only in respect of the groundedness of these stages (i. e., that we cannot understand their foundations or, correspondingly, give conditions), but also in respect of their *inherent* rationality. It will become apparent that it is not only the movement towards being a religious or Christian agent that cannot be deduced, but it will emerge that these stages can be characterised *internally* by a devaluation of rational standards.

Chapter 5

The Religious Conception in Purity of Heart and Postscript

In the previous chapter, we have seen how Kierkegaard refers actuality to the ethical as the moral and thereby gives us a practical orientation. Kierkegaard's construal of the ethical which is identified with the universal can be understood in terms of the universal law of the categorical imperative. According to Kant and Kierkegaard, to live up to the moral demand of the thus-understood universal fails because of a radical evil (Kant) or sin which shows itself to the individual as guilt (Kierkegaard). Now, whereas Kant nevertheless holds on to the categorical imperative and hence to the fulfilment of the corresponding ethical command, Kierkegaard transcends this stage and goes over to the religious¹²⁷ or to faith (which, however, is not tantamount to the specifically Christian faith which will be discussed in Chapter 6). Or, to put it differently: while Kant makes every effort to rationalise faith¹²⁸ and hence to understand it in terms of the categorical imperative, Kierke-

¹²⁷ In the following the religious will be synonymous with what Kierkegaard calls *Religiousness A* in the *Postscript*. I will be orientated towards *one* exemplification of this stage only, namely that of *Purity of Heart* and of the *Postscript*. Among others, D. Z. Phillips has attacked my claim that the kind of religiosity exemplified in *Purity of Heart* belongs to religiousness A. Besides the arguments in this chapter in support of my reading, I would like to emphasise some general points: 1) *Purity of Heart* hardly makes reference to the God-man as characteristic of the specifically Christian stage. 2) Correspondingly the concept of sin does not play a *crucial* role. On the contrary, it is guilt (repentance and regret) that gives the 'occasion' for the whole discourse. And as we will see later on, the concept of guilt is characteristic of religiousness A and not B as the *Postscript* affirms. 3) The truth of willing one thing as Kierkegaard understands it must and can only be attained by means of an act of 'recollection', that is, an act which presupposes that the individual herself already is in the mode of the possession of truth in one way or another. She does not need to 'await' it from an external source (God).

¹²⁸ This view most prominently comes to the fore in Kant's *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.

gaard de-rationalises faith. As we have seen in (4.3) Kant has immense problems in justifying the categorical imperative. Therefore we should not be too quick in accusing Kierkegaard of being an irrationalist.

The derationalisation that corresponds to religious faith (religiousness A) and the difference between the ethical and the religious, however, will not come into view until the last section of this chapter, where I will discuss Kierkegaard's departure from the categorical imperative. In the first three sections I will show that the religious stage of existence as presented in *Purity of Heart* and in the *Postscript* shares with Kant certain fundamental convictions about what morality consists in. This dimension of morality has been presupposed implicitly in the last chapter. Hence it applies to *both* the ethical and the religious in Kierkegaard. Kant discusses these issues in the *first* section of *Groundwork*, which for the most part *abstracts* from the features of the categorical imperative. We will see that in this section fundamental convictions of his practical philosophy become visible.¹²⁹

According to Kant and Kierkegaard morality and religiousness is based upon a good will being unconditionally valid. What are the characteristics of the unconditionality of the good will? In (5.1), I will introduce Kant's and Kierkegaard's conception of such a will. In (5.2), I will show that this kind of will takes *finiteness* into account in a deep sense. Additionally, I shall discuss 'where' a finite good will is to be found, namely in our ordinary or common moral (religious) cognition. In the third section (5.3), I will focus on the (formal) conclusions that follow from the good will thus understood. Against the background of these shared agreements I will show in the last section of this chapter (5.4) in what ways the principle of morality as the categorical imperative and the good will as being rational must be conceived of as different from Kierkegaard's conception of the religious stage in *Purity of Heart* and *Postscript*.

¹²⁹ I will show that these basic features can indeed be made visible – if one does not merely rely slavishly on what Kierkegaard and Kant said, but also thinks about the *meaning* and *implication* of *what* they said. Hence, the basic features of the moral life which I will discuss in this chapter do not artificially add anything to the meaning of what both authors claim.

5.1 *The Good Will as Unconditionally Good*

Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals begins with a crucial, very famous and most important assertion: ‘It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could not be considered good without limitation except a good will’ (G 393). Such a good will gives an account of what a moral attitude fundamentally consists in according to Kant.¹³⁰ Initially he does not say at all *what* the good will consists in, nor does he characterise the good will positively. In other words, he does not determine and specify the ‘content’ of the good will, i. e., that it is based upon the categorical imperative¹³¹ and hence must be understood as a fully rational will. Rather, he is concerned with the (formal) characteristics of the good will which follow or seem to follow from the crucial assertion quoted above.

The good will is good ‘without limitation’: that is to say that it is *unconditionally* good, or, as Kant puts it, it has an ‘inner unconditional worth’ (G 394).¹³² It is, so to speak, self-sufficient and has its worth ‘in itself’ or ‘by itself’ (G 394). It arises from ‘within’, irrespective of the purpose to be attained or of its impetus towards it. Let us, again, remember that this characteristic makes it a promising candidate for a practical orientation. If the human being wills in an unconditional way, her will cannot be determined by any other or any additional consideration, that is: her willing is independent of the respective situation. Since the good will is only the attitude of being good unconditionally, in respect of the practical dimension of existence, its corresponding principle can give us orientation in such a way that it is established unconditionally. Insofar as our will follows an unconditional principle, it must be interpreted as expressing actuality as Kierkegaard would say.

¹³⁰ In this chapter as well as in this book on the whole I will restrict myself to an analysis of what Kant in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (cf. CPR 110) calls the *supreme good* and not the *complete good*. Whereas the supreme good is virtue, the highest good entails the happiness of a person being virtuous. For a very thoroughgoing analysis on this issue in respect of Kant and Kierkegaard, see Alastair Hannay *Kierkegaard*, esp. pp. 210–215 and pp. 231–240.

¹³¹ To say that the categorical imperative is a *content* of the good will may be misleading since Kant is convinced that it is a *formal* principle. However, by content I simply mean a specific principle which determines the good will.

¹³² The will that is characteristic of the prudential attitude can, as we have seen, be qualified as good as well (see Chapter 3). But in this case the will is good only in a conditional and limited way, because it is dependent upon attaining happiness.

It is against this background that the main headings of *Purity of Heart* must be understood: 'If it is to be possible for a person to be able to will one thing, he must will the Good' (VIII 134). 'If a person is really to will one thing in truth, he must will the Good in truth' (VIII 144). For Kierkegaard 'to will the good (in truth)' is the same as willing the good unconditionally. This is the crucial claim of *Purity of Heart*, where, for the most part, Kierkegaard abstracts from the question regarding what such a good will would positively consist in. His emphasis is instead on the general characteristics of the good will. This makes his approach internally related to the starting-point of Kant's *Groundwork*. In the following we will see this in a more detailed way.

As we have seen, both Kant and Kierkegaard hold to the view that the good will is unconditionally or in itself good. This characteristic allows the human self a withdrawal from its finite existence, in the sense that by willing the good unconditionally the self escapes the finite attitude of being, in one way or another, determined by the world of the senses or by setting a corresponding, merely *subjective* aim (See Chapter 3). Thereby it elevates itself 'above' time or, as Kierkegaard would put it, from a *certain* understanding of time characteristic of the prudential attitude.¹³³ Since the will can be described as willing the good unconditionally and independently of such finite determinations, it can also be referred to as a limitless or 'eternal' will (Kierkegaard) in the sense that this will is unconditionally valid. As we shall see, *this* kind of eternity is sharply distinguished from any kind of *absolute* eternity or what Kant calls a holy will and it is distinguished from the concept of eternity characteristic of the Christian stage of existence. Let us, however, keep in mind that 'eternity' in *Purity of Heart* corresponds to willing the good unconditionally or willing in such a way that it is unconditionally valid.

Of course, as we have seen in the previous chapter, it is Kant's conviction that willing the good unconditionally should and must finally be identified with a certain capacity of *practical reason* which cannot be anything other than the categorical imperative. However, the first section of *Groundwork* first of all abstracts from *this* identification. It

¹³³ Alastair Hannay *Kierkegaard*, is one of the few interpreters who sees this important characteristic of Kierkegaard's conception of the ethical and the religious: 'Ethics in this respect lies beyond the self and its world, that is, beyond time. It belongs to, indeed *is*, the eternal', p. 158. If not explicitly stated otherwise, the concept of eternity will in this chapter be used in order to characterise the unconditional validity of the good will.

is fundamentally necessary to realise that it is this notion of an unconditionally good will which is at the heart of Kierkegaard's theory of authentic existence characteristic of the ethical and the religious stage. Not only does *Purity of Heart* express this view of eternity again and again, but in most of Kierkegaard's other writings the same view is repeatedly expressed.¹³⁴

5.2 *The Finiteness of the Good Will's Unconditionality and Its Domain*

Before Kant draws formal conclusions from the first sentence of *Groundwork* or before he begins 'to explicate the concept of a will that is to be esteemed in itself' (G 397), he reminds his readers of one fundamental issue: the will's basic *finiteness*. Within the realm of theoretical knowledge it has been shown that Kant as well as Kierkegaard dispute the idea that human beings are capable of creating the objects of intuition. The denial that we possess such a capacity has some kind of analogy in the practical sphere. The will is not such that it acts in a good way automatically: 'A will whose maxims *necessarily* harmonise with the laws of autonomy [that is, laws which determine the good will] is a *holy, absolutely* good will' (G 439). If a human being did have such a will, then 'all actions would always be in conformity with the autonomy of the will' (G 454).

For Kant the idea of a holy will (cf. 4.3) is important primarily in order to show that the corresponding conception of the finite human being does *not* rely on it at all. Kant does this by spelling out the inevitable consequences of such an account. *If* a human being were to have a holy will, *then* her actions would necessarily or automatically be good. But this is, for sure, simply *not* the case.

But how does a human being's finiteness relate to what was established previously, namely that it is the good will which has an unconditional worth and which is therefore not on this side of finiteness? It can mean nothing but this: human 'infinity' or unconditionality is not an absolute infinity since we are not endowed with a holy will. Neverthe-

¹³⁴ In the *Postscript*, for example, Kierkegaard writes: 'The ethical as the absolute is infinitely valid in itself and does not need embellishment in order to look better. ... [Therefore] the person who does not comprehend the infinite validity of the ethical, even if it pertained to him alone in the whole world, does not really comprehend the ethical' (VII 116).

less, for us, as the non-holy creatures that we are, we retain a way of being 'infinite' by basing our actions upon an unconditionally good will. How do we do this? The following passage sheds light on this question and focuses on the difference between a holy and a human will:

A perfectly good will would ... stand under objective laws [of the good], but it could not on this account be represented as *necessitated* to actions in conformity with law since of itself, by its subjective constitution, it can be determined only through the representation of the good. Hence no imperatives hold for the *divine* will and in general for a *holy* will: the 'ought' is out of place here, because volition is of itself necessarily in accord with the law. Therefore imperatives are only formulae expressing the relation of objective laws of volition in general to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, for example, of the human will (G 414).

The 'subjective imperfection' of the will consists in the fact that it is not automatically good. It is not a holy will and may well be determined by (an incorporation of) *a posteriori* incentives. Therefore a human being's will has to be 'necessitated' or compelled to be good. Our very finiteness makes it inevitable that we *oblige* ourselves to be good. For us as human beings the good is a *duty*. Therefore 'the concept of duty ... contains that of a good will though under certain subjective limitations and hindrances' (G 397). These 'limitations' belong to the finite existence of human beings as being open to the influence of subjective interests and inclinations to which we may give in. The ethical for a human being must be conceived of as a *requirement* as opposed to a holy being that necessarily wills what *we should* will.

There is no doubt that Kierkegaard fundamentally agrees with the claim that the good is a duty for us.¹³⁵ Every single subtitle to the main sections of *Purity of Heart* emphasises that the human being '*must* will the good' (see above). All stages of existence share this crucial characteristic since our existence is finite through and through in each of them. *What* kind of attitude is required, of course, varies according to the corresponding stage, but *that* a certain attitude of a good will is *required* in each case remains the same. It is the requirement in every stage that constitutes the self. So 'to have a self ... is ... eternity's claim upon him [the human being]' (XI 135).

¹³⁵ Compare VII 265, VII 302, VII 365. Jeremy D.B. Walker *To Will One Thing*, Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press 1972, p. 5, correctly states: 'Kierkegaard treats this concept very variously in his writings: now under one aspect (the concept of passion, the concept of love, the concept of faith), now under another: now in respect of one implication (the concept of suffering, the concept of the individual, the concept of the self and its modes of despair), now in respect of another'.

So far I have contended that Kant as well as Kierkegaard hold that the human will can be unconditionally good. The implicit meaning of eternity which goes hand in hand with such a good will is fundamentally distinguished from an absolute eternity and from the corresponding goodness of a holy will. The good and hence the good will must be conceived of as a requirement. The unconditional good for finite human beings is only good as a duty. Furthermore – a point to which I have already alluded and which will be discussed in a more detailed way in the next point of this chapter – this goodness is independent of its outcome or success. If we take this into account the question then emerges: *where* do we find such finite goodness (i. e., the good will as required of us), and how can we become aware of it? In the following it will emerge that Kant and Kierkegaard provide us with basically one and the same answer to this question.

Kant's overall aim in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* is 'the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*' (G 392) which will finally be identified with the categorical imperative. This is already the aim of the first section of this book. However, I again want to emphasise the importance of the Kantian conception independent of *this* principle and of the corresponding aim of establishing it. This is not only necessary from a purely factual perspective (the meaning of Kant's reasoning), but it is also necessary in order to do justice to the textual evidence, especially in the first section of *Groundwork*. Here Kant rarely makes use of the expression 'categorical imperative', a reluctance that hints at the fact that he does not really believe himself to have established the categorical imperative at the end of this first section and, as a matter of fact, such a conclusion would be wrong.¹³⁶

Let us bring into view Kant's *method* in this first section of *Groundwork*. Kant says explicitly that he 'wants to proceed analytically' (G 392) and he furthermore characterises his method as following: '*First section*: Transition from common rational to philosophic moral cognition' (G 392).¹³⁷ Kant intends and claims to arrive at this principle *analytically*. What has to be analysed is the *common* rational cognition, i. e., that which, as human beings, we naturally have an implicit and common understanding of. What has to be analysed is nothing *external* to us, nothing that has to be discovered as something new. On the

¹³⁶ Compare Ernst Tugendhat *Vorlesungen über Ethik*, p. 130.

¹³⁷ The latter cognition will *finally* be the same as the 'supreme principle of morality' or the categorical imperative.

contrary, it 'already dwells in natural sound understanding and needs not so much to be taught as only to be clarified' (G 397). The analytical method (in order to find out the principle of morality) aims at nothing but a clarification of our common understanding of the good. If we keep in mind the above analysis in this chapter, that the good will must be conceived as a requirement, then it follows that the clarification of the good will is a clarification of what the (possible) principle requires and upon which such a will rests. It must be a requirement inside our common selves which has to be clarified.¹³⁸ It clarifies the good that we naturally take to be commanded and the result must be to arrive at a commandment that is clarified in such a way that it provides the principle of morality.

Now, the difference and relation between the common moral cognition and the philosophic moral cognition in *Groundwork* corresponds to the difference and relation between the 'simple person' and the 'wise person' in the *Postscript* (VII 131 ff. / *SKS* 7, 148 ff.). Since this is the case Kierkegaard emphasises that common ground which these two kinds of people share, (i. e., that the attitude of the latter is fundamentally rooted in the attitude of the former). He claims that 'first of all the wise person ought to understand the same thing that the simple person understands and ought to feel bound to the same thing that binds the simple person' (VII 131 / *SKS* 7, 148). Therefore, the basic content of the ethical requirement is one and the same for the simple and the wise person. One does not become a wise person by being specially sophisticated or clever in an ordinary way. We cannot look for this content or 'wisdom' except in the core of our very selves. Accordingly this kind of wisdom cannot be taught, but has, as Kant puts it, only to be elucidated. The wise person's purpose is to make sure of and to analyse both what he and the simple person already have an implicit understanding of. He has to find out in what the ethical requirement consists in its simplicity and has to become aware of it. The 'difference between the wise person and the simplest person is this little evanescent difference that the simple person knows the essential and the wise person little by little comes to know that he knows it' (VII 132; cf. VII 151, 191 / *SKS* 7, 149; cf. 168, 207). However, the fact that the wise person does not need to teach herself what the ethical requirement consists of, but instead in some sense knows it already in

¹³⁸ From here we can understand Kant's conviction that 'in moral matters human reason can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and accomplishment, even in the most common understanding' (G 391).

her inwardness and has only to become aware of it, does not mean at all that it is easy to be wise. On the contrary, it is 'infinitely difficult' (VII 132 / SKS 7, 148) to become aware of our requirement. Although we have an implicit understanding of it, Kierkegaard asks: '*Is it not precisely the simple that is most difficult for the wise man to understand?*' (VII 132 / SKS 7, 148).

Although Kierkegaard first of all talks of the *ethical* requirement, it is clear that he also means the *religious* requirement which has to be elucidated within the human self in the same way. Against this background it is not astonishing that he begins to illustrate the difference between the simple and the wise person with 'an example from the religious sphere' (VII 134 / SKS 7, 150) (and indeed continues using examples from this sphere). After having announced this, he immediately adds that it is this sphere 'to which the ethical lies so close that they continually communicate with each other' (VII 134 / SKS 7, 150). This is revealing and confirms that there is an underlying and basic framework which is characteristic of the conception of authentic selfhood and hence that this applies to both the ethical *and* the religious sphere.¹³⁹ Of course, it is not Kierkegaard's aim to establish that it is *finally* the categorical imperative which forms the basis of the simple man's life and which therefore has to be understood and made transparent by the wise person. Indeed he is quite cautious about speaking about *one* underlying principle of morality, because he finally thinks that such a universally binding principle (as practical reason) is not possible as a self-sufficient stage of existence (as we saw in the previous chapter). However, let us hold on to the view that it is the wise person's aim to know about the simple and to clarify it in such a way that she arrives at principles of the good and that this applies not only to the ethical, but also to the religious. Therefore, in one way or another Kierkegaard, like Kant, is continually in search of such underlying principles, those which are already present in the simple person or in common moral cognition and which may give us a practical orientation.

According to Kant, this common understanding may be hidden or concealed by our implicit or explicit decision to rely on a *posteriori* incentives and hence on being prudently oriented towards happiness. But human nature cannot be alienated to such a degree that the re-

¹³⁹ Compare this also with Kierkegaard's usage of the term 'ethico-religious'. The Christian stage is basically different in this respect since the content of our very requirement first of all comes from outside us, from the God-man, as we will see in Chapter 6.

quirement of the good vanishes completely. On the contrary, it is Kant's conviction that such an attitude must be interpreted as being *derivative* of the natural and common requirement to will the morally good:

And to this extent we must admit that the judgement of those who greatly moderate, and even reduce below zero, eulogies extolling that reason is supposed to procure for us with the regard to happiness and satisfaction of life is by no means surly or ungrateful to the goodness of the government of the world; we must admit instead that these judgements have as their covert basis the idea of another and far worthier purpose of one's existence, to which therefore, and not to happiness, reason is properly destined, and to which, as supreme condition, the private purpose of the human being must for the most part defer (G 396).

The Kantian view expressed in this passage lies at the basis of Kierkegaard's theory of existence. Kant and Kierkegaard share the conviction that the ethical/religious requirement has to be elucidated and hence is already present in our common (moral) intuition. Kierkegaard like Kant is convinced that although immoral conduct (see Chapter 3) must be interpreted as a break with authentic existence, the latter nevertheless forms the basis of the former in one way or another. Inauthenticity shows itself as a turning away from authenticity. We cannot escape the ethical/religious simplicity within ourselves, and even in our deepest double-mindedness and alienation we cannot get rid of this simplicity entirely.¹⁴⁰ This idea has only been alluded to by Kant. For Kierkegaard it lies at the very core of his conception of inauthentic and authentic personhood and hence at the very core of his authorship as a whole. Most clearly and prominently this can not only be seen in *Purity of Heart*, but also in *The Sickness unto Death*. Here Kierkegaard is at pains to show that the self, being in the midst of despair and double-mindedness, cannot get rid of her authentic selfhood and finally her relation to God.¹⁴¹ Indeed, this desperation must be interpreted as not willing to be a self which has a good will. However,

¹⁴⁰ As we have seen in Chapter 3, *Purity of Heart* is based upon this very view. Accordingly, the double-minded will cannot abandon the simplicity inside herself completely although, of course, it does not actualise it.

¹⁴¹ I leave the debate whether there can be authenticity in the Kierkegaardian self here undecided, although some evidence could be found for a line of interpretation that follows Kant and his view on regulative ideals. For this debate, see Karl Verstrynge 'The Perfection of the Kierkegaardian Self in Regulative Perspective' in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 2004*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 2004.

whether we are ever capable of really actualising the good or authentic will according to Kierkegaard is an open question, I think.

5.3 Implications of the Good Will as the Sole Unconditional Good

After having discussed the finiteness of the good will's unconditionality and after having discussed where to find such a good will and its corresponding requirement, I shall now look at the *implications* of this assertion. In particular, I shall analyse the two main conclusions from the first sentence of *Groundwork* discussed in the first section by Kant. Since these two main points are internally connected, they both illuminate one and the same theme – the characteristics of an unconditional good will – from different angles. By proceeding in this way, such goodness will be brought to light more clearly.

It has been shown that for us as finite human beings the good is something that we are obliged to do; the ethical/religious is most fundamentally a requirement or a duty. However, it was shown in the third chapter that the prudential attitude, too, is led by a sense of duty. Accordingly, the will had to be determined by a hypothetical imperative of the form 'if you want y (happiness), then do x'. Therefore, it is necessary to *specify* the meaning of the sense of requirement or duty which is characteristic of the ethical/religious. Otherwise, a double-minded will as characteristic of the aesthetic stage remains indistinguishable from the will's 'true' orientation.

5.3.1 The Necessity of Acting from Duty

Now, the first analytical implication of the good will as the solely unconditional good characteristic of the simple person's common understanding of morality is the following: it is acting 'from duty', rather than simply 'in conformity with duty' that is morally significant (G 397). Indeed, if it is only the good will that is unconditionally good then it follows that it cannot be the action *itself* and not simply the action's being in conformity with duty¹⁴² which determines its goodness

¹⁴² The expression 'being in accordance with duty' is ambiguous. Insofar as it expresses the accordance of a will (and action) with the principle of the categorical imperative, it is a necessary though insufficient condition of morality since it must at the same time stem *from* duty. Insofar as it expresses an accordance with a principle that is established elsewhere, it cannot possibly possess moral worth.

(sufficiently). There is, in short, no (sufficient) *external* criterion for the goodness of the action. To act in an unconditionally good way can only be motivated by this good itself. We should do the good (and set *its* corresponding end) for its own sake and it is precisely this kind of motivation which emerges in the expression ‘from duty’.¹⁴³

The conclusion that the morally good shows itself only in an action done from duty implies that there cannot and should not be any immediate (*a posteriori*) inclination playing a role as an *additional* motivation.¹⁴⁴ If it is right to conclude that it is only acting from duty which contains or embodies the unconditionally good will, then there cannot be any further (*a posteriori*) motivation other than the good as done from duty. Up to this point the Kantian account is internally consistent, provided that one agrees with its presupposition of a finite good will as the sole unconditional good – and it will become clear that this account is thoroughly Kierkegaardian as well.¹⁴⁵

For Kierkegaard the ethical/religious is a requirement and hence a human being’s duty. Furthermore there is no doubt that for him the corresponding action¹⁴⁶ must arise *from* duty and its being *in accordance with* duty is at least insufficient for its being morally or religiously significant. Furthermore it is essential for practical orientation that the ‘criterion’ for the ethical/religious as a requirement does not arise from any *external* standard and hence not from the fact that a certain action corresponds with any established rule or custom. The requirement is such that it exclusively arises from *within* the human being (cf. 4.2). Against this background we have to understand Kierkegaard’s claim that the ‘ethical is inwardness’ (VII 116 / *SKS* 7, 133) and as we will shortly see more clearly, the same holds true of the reli-

¹⁴³ This is what Kant wants to show in the ninth paragraph of the first section of *Groundwork* (397).

¹⁴⁴ This is what Kant tries to establish mainly with the help of examples in the tenth to the thirteenth paragraphs of the first section of *Groundwork* (397–400).

¹⁴⁵ Note, that the above conclusion is true independent of the question how the expression ‘from duty’ is itself understood, that is, independent of the question whether it must be identified with a quality of reason or not. As we will see in the last chapter, the Christian stage of existence conceives of ‘from duty’ differently than Kant does.

¹⁴⁶ For Kierkegaard, though, a good will is not necessarily connected with an action, as Steven Evans *Subjectivity and Religious Belief: An Historical, Critical Study*, Grand Rapids: Christian University Press 1978, p. 161, correctly realises: ‘Kant’s practical reason is more concerned with the question ‘What shall I do?’ Kierkegaard’s subjective reflection focuses more on the question ‘What shall I be?’ But neither thinker would admit the sort of dualism between what a person is and what he does which would fundamentally separate these two questions’.

gious.¹⁴⁷ Only insofar as the human being's will is exclusively motivated by the good itself that dwells inside herself can it be understood as an unconditionally good will.

In the previous chapter we saw that the ethical self/will is in truth if her maxim is in accordance with the universal and that this must somehow correspond to the 'how' of the self-relation. We have seen above that the moral/religious will wills the good unconditionally and thereby is motivated only by the good itself. With this background we can now understand in a more thorough way what it means to be in truth and to express a certain *how*: insofar as we will the good in an unconditional way and are motivated by the good *only* denotes that the how of the will's relation is in truth. To will unconditionally and to be motivated by the good itself accordingly refers to the how of the human being's attitude and denotes the agreement with one's ideal self – the self we should be. Since this agreement can be referred to as 'truth' Kierkegaard's famous definition of this key concept becomes intelligible: '*When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual's relation is reflected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth*' (VII 166 / SKS 7, 182).¹⁴⁸ By 'the how of this relation' Kierkegaard clearly does not mean any aesthetic or theoretical attitude. This can be affirmed by the important footnote to the above definition. It says: 'The reader will note that what is being discussed here is *essential* truth'. Since Kierkegaard had said two pages earlier that 'all ethical and ethical-religious knowing is *essential* knowing' (VII 165 / SKS 7, 182) it is beyond doubt that the 'how' intrinsically belongs to the practical sphere. Let us emphasise that 'the how' means that the human being's attitude arises solely from duty and is motivated solely by the good itself.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ The *relative* difference between the ethical and Religiousness A consists in the fact that the former turns *inward* 'in self-assertion' whereas the latter 'in self-annihilation' (VII 498 ff. / SKS 7, 519 ff.). Accordingly, the ethical has guilt outside itself (although it finally fails because of it) whereas in Religiousness A the individual is fundamentally aware of it.

¹⁴⁸ A few pages later (VII 175 / SKS 7, 191), Kierkegaard identifies untruth with sin as an even deeper inwardness of human subjectivity. However, it simply does not make sense to understand 'untruth' as sin in the above passage, apart from the fact that the structure and grammar of the two sentences clearly hint at the fact that 'untruth' corresponds to objective reflection and not subjective reflection.

¹⁴⁹ In (5.4) I will provide an interpretation of what Kierkegaard exactly means by untruth in respect of the religious stage. Additionally, I will pay attention to other features of this definition of truth in respect of the Christian stage in the next chapter.

I want to emphasise that the first implication of the unconditionally good will, the necessity to act from duty, does not immediately say anything about how it must be conceived itself, whether it must be conceived of as belonging to the realm of practical reason alone or whether it can be conceived of as being affective as well – although it is clear that it cannot belong to the realm of *a posteriori* incentives as such. Still, how acting from duty or how the ‘how’ must be understood has not yet been fully analysed so far, but will be in (5.4) when we raise the question about the difference between a good will at the ethical stage and a good will at the religious stage. However, it must be maintained that the Kantian framework of the ethical as well as the Kierkegaardian framework of ethical and religious subjectivity is crucially determined by a ‘how’ of the sort I have discussed.

5.3.2 *The Necessity of Being Determined by a Universal Principle*

The second conclusion derived from the thesis that only a good will is unconditionally good is described by Kant as follows:

[An] action from duty has its moral worth *not in the purpose* to be attained by it but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon, and therefore does not depend upon the realisation of the object of the action but merely upon the *principle of volition* in accordance with which the action is done without regard for any object of the faculty of desire (G 399f.).

This is, again, a necessary analytical conclusion provided that the good will is the sole unconditional good as Kant and Kierkegaard claim. If the moral value of goodness depended upon realising some external purpose, then it would follow that the good will would not be the sole unconditional good. But if the good will cannot depend upon such a realisation and if it must not be arbitrary whether the will is good or not, then it must be the ‘maxim’, ‘the subjective principle of volition’ (G 401) which governs such a will and ‘carries’ its goodness. However, it is clear that it cannot just be any maxim or principle which is capable of determining the good will. An unconditional principle must be the very essence of the good will.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ As we have seen in Chapter 3, prudential willing is led by maxims, too. But in this case the corresponding rule cannot determine an *unconditional* good will since it turned out that it is conditional upon and founded in nature and its causalities. A will based upon such a rule can be called ‘good’ only in a conditional and relative way (in the sense of ‘good for’), but it cannot possibly be the principle of an unconditionally good will, i. e., a will of moral worth.

It is a crucial question how such a principle or rule can be found and determined. After having established the second conclusion of the first sentence of *Groundwork*, Kant claims that this principle must be ‘the formal principle of volition’ (G 400). With this expression he alludes to the categorical imperative. However, he is again reluctant to mention it explicitly. This hints at an observation which I made previously. Of course Kant thinks that the principle of volition must (finally) be the categorical imperative. Nevertheless, in the first section of *Groundwork* he hardly mentions it by name, because he himself believes that he has not shown *at this point* that the principle of volition must be identified with the categorical imperative. And indeed, at this point of the discussion in the first section of *Groundwork* one can only claim that the moral worth of the good will must arise from *an* unconditionally valid principle of volition, but it is not shown or self evident that this principle must be the categorical imperative.¹⁵¹

To base the good will upon a principle of volition means at the same time to base it upon its *possibility*. The principle of volition is a rule which makes willing the good possible. Here we can discern Kant’s so-called ‘Copernican Turn’¹⁵² in practical philosophy. An action’s being based upon the good will is not good because of any of the action’s corresponding achievements and realisations in the world. On the contrary, it is good because the good will is determined by a principle of volition being a ‘clue and supreme norm’ (G 390) of what can count as good.

In the end I want to come back to one important feature of the Kantian account: the *universality* of the good. The principle of the good will has to be an unconditional principle. The corresponding rule has, so to speak, to be self-sufficient since it cannot be conditional upon any further issue. It cannot be subjective in the sense of being arbitrary. According to Kant, being unconditional means that the rule is at the same time *universal*, i. e., it is a rule that is not only unconditionally valid for a single human being or some group of human beings, but, at the same time, for *every* human being qua human being. Hence, according to Kant, the principle of morality is a completely general principle in the sense that its ‘content’ or rule is and must be one and the same for every human being as a human being. To be a moral agent thus implies (a) basing one’s actions and the corresponding good will upon princi-

¹⁵¹ Kant anticipates the categorical imperative rather than really claims (with justice) to have established it (cf. Ernst Tugendhat *Vorlesungen über Ethik*, p. 128).

¹⁵² Compare *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxvi.

ples as the source of moral worth. At the same time it implies (b) basing the good will upon its possibility and finally it implies (c) that this principle applies to every human being as such.¹⁵³

Of course, Kant is convinced that the categorical imperative is the *only* principle which is universal with regard to practical orientation. However, note again that he has not really established *this* interpretation. He has only shown that it must be determined by *a* principle. As we have seen in the last chapter, Kant is not very successful in justifying the categorical imperative. Hence we may leave it open whether the categorical imperative is the *only* principle that counts as universal. As we will see in (5.4), the religious stage is based upon a different *kind of* universality.

We have seen several times that the moral worth of the good will is not dependent upon what is achieved or realised by it. It can only be the corresponding principle(s) of the good will as its (their) essence that determines it. Kierkegaard does not explicitly say this. However, the ethical and religious stages of existence in his writings can generally be seen as attempts to determine principles of the good will¹⁵⁴ and thereby to establish an orientation for the human being.

¹⁵³ As we have seen, the assertion that the good will is the sole unconditional good implies that the corresponding action must (1) arise from duty as its sole motivation and (2) have its worth in the principle of the good will. The third implication (according to the issue itself *we* can still abstract from its specific content, that is, the categorical imperative) follows analytically from (1) and (2). Kant says: 'The third proposition, which is a consequence of the two preceding, I would express as follows: *duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law*' (G 400). Kierkegaard does not refer to the concept of respect extensively. Therefore, I will not discuss this characteristic in detail. However, since it follows necessarily from the first two implications, this feature must be on this side of Kierkegaard's approach. As Kant recognises, the concept of 'respect' implies the concept of '*interest*': 'All so-called moral *interest* consists simply in *respect* for the law' (G 402, footnote). Against this background, it is not astonishing that the Kierkegaardian discussion of interest has crucial affinities with the Kantian account. However, Kierkegaard also understands the concept of interest according to its etymological inheritance, namely as 'inter-esse' or as 'being in between'. With this strategy, he can do much more justice to states of mind or attitudes, which are in between immorality and morality (like anxiety). Heinrich M. Schmidinger's book *Das Problem des Interesses und die Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, München: Alber 1983, gives a very long and erudite historical account of this concept including a discussion of Kant, without, however, seeing the basic affinities to Kierkegaard in respect of the issue itself.

¹⁵⁴ For Kant such a principle of the will can only be a mere form of willing whereas for Kierkegaard this only holds for the ethical stage as discussed in the last chapter. The status of religious principles cannot be sufficiently described in terms of having a mere form, as we will see in the final section of this chapter.

Each singular stage of existence described by Kierkegaard presents principles of volition which are *possible* to realise in human existence. This implies the claim that human beings can *potentially* rely on these principles or that these principles can be seen as possibilities to rely on.¹⁵⁵

But why does Kierkegaard insist on referring *actuality* and not possibility to the ethical as we saw repeatedly? In section two of the second part of the *Postscript* (VII 273 ff. / SKS 7, 290 ff.) he asserts: 'Ethically, it holds true that possibility is understood only when each *posse* is actually an *esse*. ... [w]hen the ethical inspects, it condemns every *posse* that is not an *esse*, a *posse*, namely in the individual himself' (VII 279 / SKS 7, 295).¹⁵⁶ Therefore, Kierkegaard is convinced that '[f]rom an ethical point of view, actuality is superior to possibility' (VII 275 / SKS 7, 291). However, as we may conclude from the above quote, it cannot be Kierkegaard's opinion that the ethical refers to the actual *as such* or absolutely. He does, of course, not recommend forgetting about the possible altogether. Existing ethically or religiously is, of course, different from any kind of mere activism. Conversely, the ethical does not condemn the possible as such, but only the possible insofar as it is something which agents do not attempt to realise it or to make actual. But this is genuinely Kantian. It is as important for Kant as it is for Kierkegaard that the good will's being based on the corresponding principle must be realised and hence become actual – 'not, of course, as a mere wish, but as the summoning of all means insofar as they are in our control' (G 394). To understand the possible *ethically* means unconditionally to will its realisation. It does not at all mean leaving the possible out of consideration.

Now, 'the possible' to which Kierkegaard refers is another name for what Kant calls the principle of volition. Certainly such a principle also has the status of a possibility for Kant. Its corresponding rule depicts the possibility of a good will. However, the principle(s) of volition are not only *possibilities* of human existence and the corresponding conduct. At the same time they are, according to Kierkegaard, also principles which are *universally* valid for every human being:

¹⁵⁵ Michael Theunissen 'Kierkegaard's Werk und Wirkung' in *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, p. 24, is one of the few interpreters who have stressed Kierkegaard's claim that he has (exhaustively) discussed and determined the *possible* ways in which existence or volition can be expressed.

¹⁵⁶ My discussion here of the complicated relation between possibility and actuality cannot be very detailed in this connection and cannot do justice to the richness of the corresponding text in the *Postscript*.

‘Possibility operates with the ideal human being (not with regard to difference but with regard to the universal), who is related to every human being as a requirement’ (VII 311 / *SKS* 7, 327). ‘To will to be an individual human being (which one unquestionably is) in the same sense as everyone else is capable of being – that is the ethical victory over life’ (VII 309 / *SKS* 7, 325 ff.).¹⁵⁷ Correspondingly, Kierkegaard claims in respect of the religious stage: ‘Religiousness A ... has only universal human nature as its presupposition’ (VII 488 / *SKS* 7, 508).

The ethical and the religious stages of existence in Kierkegaard’s writings can generally be seen, then, as attempts to determine not only possible but also *universal* principles of the good will. Although Kierkegaard as, perhaps, *the* thinker of individuality is often reluctant to speak of general and universal principles and although he will indeed be reluctant to agree that the categorical imperative may be the only and final answer to human beings’ existence, this important issue must not be overlooked. It is decisive for our understanding of Kierkegaardian thought of the ethical and religious stages that it is indeed the above mentioned universality of the corresponding principles of volition in the ethical and the religious stages which makes possible the particularity and individuality of human beings’ existence and hence which makes possible practical orientation. Only by acting upon general principles which are universally valid and which denote the ideality of what there should be, will ethical and religious individuality be possible.¹⁵⁸

5.4 Kierkegaard’s *Departure from the Categorical Imperative*

In the three previous sections of this chapter we have become aware of the extent to which the conception of Religiousness A in *Purity of Heart* and in the *Postscript* conform to basic Kantian convictions about what morality consists of. This agreement has been shown exclusively in respect of the first section of *Groundwork*, however, without reference to the categorical imperative. If we pay attention to what *this* principle of morality consists in, then we must discern a fun-

¹⁵⁷ Compare *Purity of Heart*, VIII 181, etc.

¹⁵⁸ In respect of the ethical stage this has been shown in a convincing way by Johannes Sløk *Die Anthropologie Kierkegaards*, Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger 1954, esp. pp. 19–35. However, this well-argued book surprisingly does not contain a single reference to the Kantian inheritance.

damental difference between the conceptions of Kant and Kierkegaard. In the following I will argue, accordingly, that the religious ideal in *Purity of Heart* and the *Postscript* is not that of the categorical imperative.

We have seen that Kant's ethical life-view is based upon the idea of practical reason as the categorical imperative. According to this view, each singular maxim or attitude must be an instance of universality thus understood. In other words, it must be capable of being universalised and of being derivable from the categorical imperative. Only if we can derive the maxim from this law is the will a good will. That Kierkegaard's conception of the ethical in *Fear and Trembling* is compatible with the Kantian conception appeared in his repeated claim that the ethical is the universal. Whereas for Kant the impossibility of such a universalisation is tantamount to a failure altogether, this is not necessarily the case at the stage of Kierkegaard's Religiousness A. Kant prioritises the categorical imperative whereas Kierkegaard transcends the ethical stage of existence and that means transcending that which must be capable of being universalised by means of practical reason as Kant understands it. It is Kierkegaard's conviction that practical reason or the categorical imperative is not a guideline for what is capable of being a religious maxim. A successful derivation of a maxim from the categorical imperative does not necessarily guide us to what we are obliged to do. Kierkegaard does not claim this explicitly in *Purity of Heart*, but no passage can be found in which he suggests that the human being may rely on a universal principle *as the incarnation of Kantian reason*.

However, as we have seen, we are supposed to will in such a way that it denotes the universally human. It is the universality of the law to love unconditionally that is at the heart of a good will according to Kierkegaard. Only if the human being exemplifies this universality within her subjectivity, is she capable of being a religious agent. Nevertheless it is not a necessary condition of this that we must derive our will from the categorical imperative. In other words: it may be possible that the maxim at the religious stage is not derived from the categorical imperative. Although the human being's existential ideal is still some kind of universal, it is impossible for her to derive her maxim from it by means of a practical derivation in the manner Kant considers possible. Let us, against this background, remember how Kant describes an attitude that cannot be derived from the universality of the categorical imperative: the attitude would imply 'the liberty of making an *exception*' (G 425). Since such a liberty cannot be uni-

versalised, it stands in *contradiction* to the universal thus understood. Accordingly, Kant is convinced that 'we would find a contradiction in our own will' (G 425). An exception or contradiction demonstrates that the maxim is not practically reasonable in the Kantian sense. But insofar as the human being is left with a subjective principle of volition which cannot be brought into accordance with universality in Kant's manner, her very subjectivity becomes emphasised. How the individual derives her maxim from the unconditional law to love is not constrained by reason and its public dimension. We cannot, so to speak, publicly discuss which action is (possibly) good and which action is (possibly) not good. In a more radical way it becomes a matter of our individual will or our individual conscience.¹⁵⁹ Accordingly we can understand Kierkegaard's emphasis on the *singularity* of the individual at the religious stage. The category of singularity or subjectivity is the crucial category. This Kierkegaard expresses clearly at the very beginning of *Purity of Heart*, where he says: 'To "That Single Individual" this little book is dedicated'.¹⁶⁰

As I also showed in the last chapter, practical and theoretical reason are internally connected with each other according to Kant. Certainly, the ethical belongs to the practical sphere and only insofar as we (try to) base our actions upon the corresponding principle of the will, can we be referred to as moral agents. However, it is *possible* that we can represent practical reason theoretically, that is, we are *capable* of thinking the ethical in terms of a theoretical inference from one assertion to the other. A practical derivation must always correspond to a theoretical inference according to Kant. The fact that Kierkegaard again agrees with Kant in this respect became clear in his repeated claim that the ethical (as displayed in *Fear and Trembling*) is capable of being *mediated*. In other words: we can and must be capable of reflecting upon the ethical objectively, that is, in terms of determinations of thinking. Now, the impossibility of universalisation that leads

¹⁵⁹ Kierkegaard does not illuminate in exactly what way a religious will may be capable of being derived from the universal, although it must rest upon some kind of universality.

¹⁶⁰ In the text that was intended to accompany this dedication we can find further (indirect) confirmation for the inevitable necessity that to become a single individual is possible only if we rely on a *universally* human as the human task which applies to everyone (XIII 591 ff.). A singularity without being the expression of *some* kind of universality would belong to the aesthetic sphere according to Kierkegaard. Hence it would be a clear mistake to hold that the single individual, as one of the main categories of Kierkegaard's religious thinking, does not rely on some universality.

to an exception or contradiction in our maxim must also reveal itself as the impossibility of a theoretically represented inference or mediation. Correspondingly, the impossibility of a mediation must be a contradiction as well according to Kierkegaard. Since *religious* willing cannot (or at least does not need to) be an instance of the categorical imperative, it would be consistent (and my interpretation would be consistent) if religious willing revealed a contradiction or a paradox if we tried to mediate it.¹⁶¹

In order to find evidence for the claim that religious willing involves a paradox and hence the impossibility of a mediation, let us have a look at a couple of passages in the *Postscript* which basically refer to characteristics of Religiousness A: 'When subjectivity, inwardness, is truth, then truth, objectively defined, is a paradox' (VII 171 / SKS 7, 187). '*An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth*, the highest truth there is for an *existing* person' (VII 170 / SKS 7, 186). 'Faith is the contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and the objective uncertainty' (VII 170 / SKS 7, 187). 'At its highest, inwardness in an existing subject is passion; truth as a paradox corresponds to passion' (VII 166 / SKS 7, 182).

From an objective viewpoint, that is, from the viewpoint of the determinations of thinking, truth is *uncertain* or *paradoxical*. In other words: we fail to make sense if we (try to) represent or think the attitude objectively. Objective uncertainty or paradoxality is exemplified in the impossibility of inferring from subjectivity to universality. If we cannot draw theoretical inferences, then, according to Kant, the will cannot possibly be an unconditionally good will, that is, the individual cannot possibly be motivated by the good itself. In Kierkegaardian terms: the will cannot possibly be subjectively in truth. Kierkegaard disagrees with Kant fundamentally in this respect. According to Kierkegaard, the objective uncertainty or paradoxality does not exclude the unconditional good will, but, on the contrary, seems even to be necessary if the individual is to be in truth subjectively. From the view-

¹⁶¹ I see no reason to believe that the conception of religious willing in *Purity of Heart* allows for a mediation with the kind of universal that one finds in the categorical imperative. That a contradiction or paradox is not discussed in this book can be explained by the fact that it is written from the viewpoint of faith (Religiousness A), that is, from the faithful *subjective* viewpoint. Correspondingly, Kierkegaard says in the *Point of View*, 'the point of departure in the upbuilding discourses is in the upbuilding' (XIII 601).

point of subjective reflection, the individual is in truth if the how of her will or self-relation is in truth, that is, if she is solely motivated by the good itself or if she acts from duty. This corresponds to Kierkegaard's emphasis on 'the how'. To act independently of having the security of reason's guideline¹⁶² is Kierkegaard's advice, that is, the security of objective reflection in terms of inferring.¹⁶³

In the above quotes we have seen that a religious will is objectively paradoxical. Subjectively, that is, insofar as the individual is in truth subjectively (motivated by the good itself), she is in passion as Kierkegaard explicitly says. Let us try to illuminate this a bit further. We will then be in a position to understand the difference in respect of the status of the will's being unconditionally good according to Kant and Kierkegaard. As we have seen, the existential ideal in *Purity of Heart* is the law of love. Kant claims that 'love as an inclination cannot be commanded' (G 399). Kierkegaard agrees with this view in the sense that love cannot be a *mere* feeling, that is, cannot be *merely* on this side of inclinations: as an inclination it 'happens' to us and hence cannot be a matter of obligation. Although the categorical imperative can also be understood as a principle that commands practical love (cf. G 399), it is important to realise that Kierkegaard, as opposed to Kant, does not consider it to be necessary that our will to love be grounded in practical reason. Kant annihilates every possibility that affections may ground moral worth.¹⁶⁴ Thereby he splits the human being into two parts – the noumenal realm of reason and the realm of a *posteriori* incentives. The religious stage of existence can be understood as a 'solution' to this Kantian conception which involves a split of human

¹⁶² Kierkegaard partly denounces reason because, according to him, it involves some kind of deceptive security as it sometimes becomes apparent in Judge William's life-view as well as in *Fear and Trembling*.

¹⁶³ The above analysis cannot be proven directly by any of the Kierkegaardian writings. Nevertheless, I think that it corresponds to the distinction between the ethical as conceived of in *Fear and Trembling* and so-called Religiousness A. As I have repeatedly emphasised, Kierkegaard claims that an ethical attitude can be derived from and mediated with the universal. Although Religiousness A does crucially rely on a universal (law to love) as well, there is not a single reference to a corresponding possibility of derivation or mediation any more. Therefore, I contend that Religiousness A and the ethical can be separated from each other in the way indicated.

¹⁶⁴ Even though Kant gives a fascinating account of the peculiar feeling of respect especially in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and even though without such feeling we could not put a moral will into action according to him, it does in no way constitute moral worth as such.

personality into these two realms being alien to each other¹⁶⁵ – the self and its corresponding practical orientation as conceived of at the religious stage is not a self which is separated into two parts. A religious will as Kierkegaard conceives it is a *passionate* will and as such different from and on the other side of a *posteriori* incentives or mere emotions.¹⁶⁶ As Kierkegaard puts it in the *Postscript*: ‘in strong passions and the like, I have material enough, and therefore pain enough in forming something good out of it with the aid of reason’ (VII 133 / SKS 7, 150). In a religious self ‘reasonable’ and ‘affective’ aspects relate to each other in a peculiar way which leaves neither ‘unchanged’. As we have seen time and again, Kierkegaard nevertheless agrees with the basic dimensions of morality as set out by Kant in the first section of *Groundwork*. The will must be an unconditionally good will and must arise from duty. Now if the religious self involves affections or ‘love’, then these affections are the result of their *integration* into an unconditionally good will.¹⁶⁷ A good will is not a *merely* emotional will. Correspondingly, Kierkegaard understands acting from duty as affective. He definitely does not *substitute* the affect for the duty (as does, for example, Schopenhauer).¹⁶⁸

As I have noted, the necessity of a moral action stemming from duty (the ‘true how’ of the will for Kierkegaard) denotes the subjective as-

¹⁶⁵ With the background that a religious attitude is not tantamount to a reasonable attitude, Kierkegaard implicitly takes over Hegel's criticism of Kant to have divided the human self (as developed in the *Philosophy of Right*).

¹⁶⁶ In ‘Some Remarks on the Concept of Passion’ in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. by Robert Perkins, Macon: Mercer University Press 1984, pp. 107–132, Robert C. Roberts shows convincingly how an emotional attitude differs from a passionate attitude.

¹⁶⁷ Corresponding to this kind of integration Kierkegaard is ‘transcending the dichotomy between intellect and will, between active and passive’ as Jamie Ferreira correctly points out – see her ‘Making Room for Faith – Possibility and Hope’ in *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion*, ed. by D.Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin, London: MacMillan Press 2000, pp. 73–88. In this connection compare her brilliant book *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991.

¹⁶⁸ Indeed, this is, I think, the only possible or ‘reasonable’ way to disagree with Kant since acting from duty is, as we have seen, an *analytical* conclusion from the assertion that it is only the good will which is unconditionally good. Therefore, I think that the Kierkegaardian move to understand acting from duty as affectionate is the very strength of his account. Interpreters often do not conceive of this conception appropriately. Even Alastair Hannay *Kierkegaard*, p. 258, asserts categorically: ‘Either you force yourself to do something ... or you do as you are inclined. You cannot do both simultaneously, and only the first ... can be acting from duty’.

pect of a moral action whereas the accordance with the principle of the categorical imperative denotes its objective aspect (cf. G 400). These two aspects are internally connected with one another with regard to Kantian morality or a possible reading of the ethical in Kierkegaard. An action done from duty must be in accordance with the universal principle of the categorical imperative despite the fact that its mere accordance is not sufficient for the action to have moral worth. We have seen now that a religious will is not in accordance with the universal thus understood and could consequently not be mediated theoretically or thought by means of theoretical reason. Thereby its very subjectivity or singularity became emphasised as I pointed out. We are now in a position to realise more concretely that the movement from the ethical to the religious involves an abandonment of the objective aspect of morality as Kant construes it. Kant was convinced that the categorical imperative gives us a guideline for actions we should do, because he was convinced that if we can will and think maxims in such a way that they are in accordance with the universal law of the categorical imperative, they must be pursued. The accordance with the categorical imperative is a necessary though, of course, not sufficient condition of moral actions according to Kant. Kierkegaard breaks with *this* objective aspect of morality in respect of a religious will and emphasises the subjective aspect of a practical orientation, that is, the necessity to be motivated by the good itself or to act from duty. Let me reiterate: *'When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual's relation is reflected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth ...'* (VII 166 / SKS 7, 182). The abandonment of the objective aspect of a practical orientation corresponds to the failure of conceiving of it theoretically. If we reflect upon this objective aspect (the necessary accordance of our maxims with the moral law) in terms of theoretical reasoning or what Kierkegaard calls an (instance of) objective reflection as mediation, we arrive or may arrive at something not being true. According to Kierkegaard our practical orientation can very well be true *'even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth'* (VII 166 / SKS 7, 182).

Despite the fact that a good will at the stage of Religiousness A must be understood differently from a good will at the ethical stage, it is Kierkegaard's conviction that this stage fails, too. It fails because of guilt, the very same reason the ethical stage fails.¹⁶⁹ Whether it is un-

¹⁶⁹ This view is clearly expressed in the introduction of *Purity of Heart* in connection with repentance and regret (VIII 124 ff.).

derstood as Kant's practical love (the categorical imperative) at the ethical stage, or in terms of passion at the stage of Religiousness A, human love *fails*. In other words: as a self-sufficient agent the human being seems to be incapable of realising moral or religious worth inside herself. Relying on herself it is impossible to overcome a radical evil or an absolute guilt-consciousness. This inability of the human being to live up to what the universal commands may entail some kind of 'justification' for proceeding to the next and final stage of existence. This next stage is Religiousness B in which, as we will see, the love of Jesus as the God-man and the belief in him gives, so to speak, additional strength to love. Kierkegaard believes that through the love of God (receiving the grace of the God-man), the human being then becomes capable of loving. Only by giving up one's own strivings completely and letting oneself be grounded in God's love, does one become capable of leaving guilt and the corresponding double-mindedness.

What also could motivate us to proceed from Religiousness A to the next and final stage of Religiousness B¹⁷⁰ may rest in the intuition that we can only truly believe in something and act according to it, if the security of our objective viewpoint is given up. Religiousness A already breaks with the security of resting in a universal that can be mediated, that is, a universal which is tantamount to reason. Now, Religiousness A, although paradoxical in the sense shown above, does not seem to break with *every* kind of rationality. Accordingly, Kierkegaard expresses in the *Postscript* that Religiousness A involves some kind of *speculation* (VII 497 f. / SKS 7, 518 f.) and hence some kind of security. We may understand what Kierkegaard means if we pay attention to the fact that it is Socrates who is considered to be representative of Religiousness A in one way or another. It was one of the main tasks of Socrates to demonstrate the inconsistencies in other people's life-views or to refute their convictions. Such demonstration certainly has the principle of contradiction at its very core. However, the life-view of Socrates himself may not give a 'positive' practical orientation.¹⁷¹ He did not give a 'guideline' as Kant may have given with his conception of the categorical imperative. Hence we may conclude that Kierkegaard's conception of Religiousness A finally leaves Kant behind in the direction of Socrates. This would also be in accordance

¹⁷⁰ This basic question can only be touched upon in this connection.

¹⁷¹ The thoroughgoing negativity of Socrates' position is discussed in K. Brian Söderquist *The Closed Self. Nihilism and Hubris in Kierkegaard's The Concept of Irony*, unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Copenhagen 2004.

with the very conception of Kierkegaard's *Purity of Heart*: the aim of this discourse is to understand what it means to will the good in truth. However, it is hardly ever expressed positively. Even though Kierkegaard's conception of a practical orientation has deep affinities with the first section of *Groundwork*, he implicitly rejects the categorical imperative as a guideline. Correspondingly, we are never told positively what we ought to do. Time and again it is Kierkegaard's main theme to reveal the will as double-minded and to *refute* those life-views that claim to will the good as the 'one thing'. Hence we may say that all these refutations involve some kind of speculation on an existential level. However, the speculation remains negative. It takes for granted though that 'oneness' or some kind of consistency is an ideal which is definitely worth striving for and thereby keeps loyal to speculation in one way or another.

Anticipating the next stage of existence, we can say that some kind of speculation is still at work in Religiousness A since the uppermost principle of the understanding, the principle of contradiction, is not yet annihilated. According to Kierkegaard, only a conception that, so to speak, fully annihilates rationality may 'confront ... you with a choice: whether you will *believe* ... or not' (XII 125, my emphasis). As I will argue, the Christian stage of existence involves a final annihilation of the understanding: the annihilation of the principle of contradiction.

Chapter 6

The Christian Stage of Existence and Its Departure from Kant

In this book we have become acquainted with the Kantian dimension in Kierkegaard's thinking. So far we have not dealt with Kierkegaard's Christian stage of existence. Indeed, this stage relies on features that depart from Kant's conception in more thoroughgoing ways than the religious stage. In fact, it is this conception where nearly all affinity with Kantian thinking stops. While it will be impossible to do full justice to the richness of Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity, nevertheless I will relate some of the fundamental features of this stage to some important results achieved so far. This will especially involve an ongoing reference to the ethical and the religious stages.

Let us, once again, have a look at the crucial passage in the *Postscript* which describes the nature of objective and subjective reflection:

When the question about truth is asked objectively, truth is reflected upon objectively as an object to which the knower relates himself. What is reflected upon is not the relation, but that what he relates himself to is the truth, the true. If only that to which he relates himself is the truth, the true, then the subject is in the truth. When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual's relation is reflected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth. (VII 166 / SKS 7, 182).

These two sentences provide us with formal features of objective and subjective reflection which can be put into relation to all stages of existence. As we have seen in the last two chapters, to be in truth subjectively means to be in agreement with one's ideal self, the self we should be. In the *aesthetic* stage the 'how' of the relation cannot possibly be in truth since the principle upon which it is based is a conditional principle or what Kierkegaard calls prudence and hence is not truly ideal. The true kind of ideality, by way of contrast, must be an unconditional principle with which our will has to agree. The will (the relation) agrees with its ideality if it is itself unconditional and thereby exemplifies a certain how. Correspondingly, our motivation consists

of willing the good for its own sake. According to my reading, the *ethical* stage implies being in truth in the sense of being in agreement with the categorical imperative. The how of the relation can be in truth and, as seen above, such an attitude can be mediated or reflected objectively. The individual does not relate to untruth and hence is capable of relating to truth theoretically. The religious stage involves being in truth subjectively although the attitude cannot be mediated and is hence objectively paradoxical.

At the ethical stage being in truth finally fails because of guilt. Guilt-consciousness then became central at the religious stage of existence. Though the existential ideal at the religious stage corresponds to a deeper kind of inwardness which already must be understood as paradoxical (since it departs from the idea of reason), Kierkegaard claims that *its* corresponding command to love cannot be realised either.¹⁷² Now, as soon as we enter or leap into the Christian stage of existence guilt becomes transformed into sin. According to Kierkegaard, it is the specifically Christian God/God-man who ‘makes’ the human being aware of the true nature of guilt as *sin*. We are not simply guilty because we fail to realise the ethico-religious command, but we understand that our conduct and our attitude is tantamount to a disobedience of the Christian God’s command and thereby we enter a position in which we may be forgiven by this God.

Having this in mind we may ask: how must we relate the nature of the Christian stage to the above passage? What does being in truth consist of subjectively? What is the sense of ‘untruth’ viewed from an objective viewpoint at this stage of existence? In order to keep track of the complicated issues involved and to answer these questions, I will first of all (6.1) have a closer look at Christian existence from a *practical* viewpoint or from what Kierkegaard calls subjective reflection. I will thereby primarily refer to *Practice in Christianity* and to the *Postscript*. Thereafter (6.2), I will show that – against the tendency in secondary literature to rationalise faith – Kierkegaard’s conception of Jesus as the God-man does involve a *logical* contradiction in the strict sense. In connection with this I will mainly refer to the *Postscript*.

¹⁷² Therefore the ‘totality of guilt-consciousness is the most upbuilding element in Religiousness A’ (footnote, VII 489 / SKS 7, 509).

6.1 *The Possibility of Subjective Reflection*

Jesus as Christ is *the* decisive feature of the Christian stage of existence. He is *the* decisive dimension for becoming a 'real' Christian according to Kierkegaard. At the ethical and religious stages of existence we are supposed to base our will upon limitless principles which we find solely *within* ourselves. We try to realise a principle (the categorical imperative, the law to love passionately) as an ethical or religious possibility which expresses our universal task: Religiousness A, no less than the ethical, 'has only universal human nature as its presupposition' (VII 488 / SKS 7, 508). It is an unconditional duty to realise *this* kind of possibility as that which every human being finds *inwardly*. To speak with Kant: it 'already dwells in the natural sound understanding and needs not so much be taught as merely to be elucidated' (G 397). Or as Kierkegaard puts it: 'in A the more specific qualification of inward deepening is the *only* more specific qualification' (VII 485 / SKS 7, 506, my emphasis). Accordingly it is also true for Kierkegaard that in the ethical and the religious the individual is 'turned inward' (VII 498 / SKS 7, 519). It is here where we must, again, acknowledge a fundamental difference from the Christian stage of existence:

[Religiousness B] makes conditions in such a way that the conditions are not the dialectical concentrations of inward deepening but a definite something.... In Religiousness B, the upbuilding¹⁷³ is something *outside* the individual; the individual does not find the upbuilding by finding the relationship with God within himself but relates himself to something outside himself in order to find the upbuilding (VII 485, 489 / SKS 7, 505 ff, 510, italics mine).

In B, the individual does not conceive of her task primarily as a possibility which rests exclusively inside her very nature. Our human task cannot be elucidated as something that already dwells only in our very selves. It is not a timeless unconditional universal law that every human being can and could on principle become aware of through some kind of introspection or 'recollection' as Kierkegaard puts it. 'God' is not within us, but first of all radically outside us in the Gestalt of Christ/Jesus (God-man) at a certain point in time. At the ethical and the religious stage the how of the self's relation is in truth or expresses definitive orientation if we let our will be determined by limitless principles that we find *inwardly*. Now, it has emerged that at the Christian stage, what we ought to do does not stem from within the human being, but

¹⁷³ The 'upbuilding' can be understood as 'love' since, according to *Works of Love*, only love builds up.

from without, namely from the God-man. It is not our inward nature that is the source of what we ought to do, but it is the God-man as the eternal itself. It is the God-man who teaches us what to do and upon what kinds of principles to rely. Therefore, we do not do the good where it is based upon the principle of morality or religiosity as *our* very source of self-obligation. Rather, we seek the source of the good such that our duty is rooted in the God-man. That the truth is *revealed* at the stage of Religiousness B implies that it ‘cannot have been prior to itself’ (VII 488 / SKS 7, 508). In other words: grasping what it means to be a Christian is radically dependent upon the occurrence of the God-man two thousand years ago. In respect of the ethical or religious stage it is not decisive whether any human being has *de facto* ever willed and acted in a moral or religious way,¹⁷⁴ but what is decisive is that it was and is always the case *potentialiter*. In this sense the ethical as well as the religious stage is indeed prior to itself as its *de facto* realisation. On the contrary, before the occurrence of the God-man, it was not even *possible* for a human being to be a Christian according to Kierkegaard. Religiousness B involves giving up trying to realise an ethical/religious possibility which has its origin in our inwardness as the universally human. It involves that kind of possibility of our existence in which we understand it as not originating from within the self. It is rather conceived of as stemming from the commands of Jesus as the God-man himself. In contrast to the ethical/religious we can say: what our duty consists of cannot be *elucidated*, but indeed must somehow be *taught* before it may be appropriated inwardly. It is Jesus who is our teacher according to Kierkegaard.

Now we can formally say: if we accept Jesus as our teacher and act accordingly, then we are Christians. But if Religiousness A is already paradoxical from an objective viewpoint (5.4) – and we can anticipate that Religiousness B will be even more paradoxical – how can we grasp the God-man? *How* can he *teach* us or how can we *be taught* by him? How can someone who is the God-man and who, according to Kierkegaard, is a ‘sign of contradiction’ (XII 119), make himself understood? How could we be capable of deriving our will from such an ultimate basis? How can someone have authority who undermines this very authority by destroying every possible basis for justification

¹⁷⁴ For both Kant and Kierkegaard it is not decisive that an ethical (and religious) attitude has ever occurred *as a matter of fact*, but rather that it is *possible* that it could have occurred. On the contrary, it is decisive that at the Christian stage, the God has *actually* entered time as the God-man and ‘fulfilled’ the law.

of one's claims and who hence is necessarily inconceivable? In other words: how can we legitimately be taught by someone who in himself cannot be understood, that is, by someone who saws off the branch upon which he sits? I can only allude to the highly complicated issues here that Kierkegaard primarily discusses in his later work *Practice in Christianity*.

First of all we can say: in an important sense Jesus *cannot* teach. Kierkegaard expresses this view by stressing the impossibility of a direct communication¹⁷⁵ of the God-man:

If someone says directly: I am God; the Father and I are one, this is direct communication. But if the person who says it, the communicator, is this individual human being, an individual human being just like others, then this communication is not entirely direct, because it is not entirely direct that an individual human being should be God – whereas what he says is entirely direct. Because of the communicator the communication contains a contradiction ... (XII 125).

The communication *itself* is fully direct, that is, expresses a 'what' and could hence be understood objectively. However, according to Kierkegaard, it is impossible to abstract from the communicator in order to make sense of the communication. Or, it is possible, but then what it means to be taught and to be a Christian becomes a matter of erudite scholarship or what Kierkegaard disparagingly calls 'paragraph-communication or professor communication' (XII 116). It is the communicator as the sign of contradiction who prevents himself necessarily from teaching directly. Jesus as the God-man cannot *possibly* teach us directly since he cannot possibly communicate to us directly. By means of the peculiar self-contradictory status of *himself* every direct assertion or claim principally fails to have objective legitimacy.¹⁷⁶ How should we nevertheless make sense of someone who claims to be a sign of contradiction (and, as we will see more specifically in 6.2, embodies a logical contradiction)? How can someone teach or communicate and give practical orientation to us, who himself cannot be understood from our objective viewpoint or from the viewpoint of our understanding?

Let us approach the answer to this question by first of all saying in a rather formal way that grasping what the God-man teaches rests first

¹⁷⁵ Whatever else the problem of direct communication consists in – it also involves making oneself understandable theoretically, that is, in terms of categories of thought.

¹⁷⁶ Even the God-man cannot teach and make himself understandable. Throughout *Practice in Christianity* Kierkegaard expresses this conviction: 'We see that direct communication is an impossibility for the God-man, for inasmuch as he is the sign of contradiction he cannot communicate himself directly ...' (XII 119).

of all in an endorsement of *himself* in a peculiar way that cannot be the way of thinking. For Kierkegaard this way is (Christian) *believing*. Accordingly, he claims that it 'is precisely the object of faith and only that can be believed' (VII 177 / SKS 7, 193). We *must* first of all and most importantly believe in the God-man in order to understand the way in which he may 'teach' us. Correspondingly, it is Kierkegaard's repeated point not only in the *Postscript*, but also in *Practice in Christianity* that 'the teacher is more important than the teaching' (XII 115). To grasp the God-man's teaching *presupposes* believing in him as what he proclaims himself to be: the son of God and a finite human being at the same time. But as we have seen, we cannot directly understand the God-man's teaching, because of his peculiar nature. The God-man's teaching prevents the human being from objective understanding and is hence 'the very opposite' (XII 118) from every ordinary teaching. Accordingly, the God-man 'confronts you with a choice: whether you will believe him or not' (XII 125).

Whatever else such confrontation may imply – at least it must involve for us the God-man's love, since Kierkegaard is convinced: 'He is love ...' (XII 128). Let us try to understand in a more fully-fledged way what such 'teaching' and being taught may consist of. To be sure, the teacher must in one way or another express his love in his teaching so that we can be taught. How does his love articulate itself? First of all it shows itself by becoming man.¹⁷⁷ Secondly it shows itself by the kind of life he leads as the God-man. Since the way in which the teacher expresses himself in his teaching or the way in which he loves cannot be a direct or objective way, he must do so in an indirect or *subjective* way. As we know, Kierkegaard generally claims that if only the '*how*' of the self's relation is in truth, then she is in truth *subjectively* (VII 166 / SKS 7, 182). Therefore, it becomes decisive in what ways the *how* of the God-man's self-relation shows itself and, of course, this will include the kinds of attitudes on which his actions are based. In other words: the kind of willing (leading actions) of the God-man through which he loves is the main way in which he expresses himself and *thereby* expresses his teaching.

So how can *we* relate to the God-man and how can we be taught? As we have seen, we must *believe* in him as the God-man. But how does such belief show itself? The only way which we can possibly relate to him is practically, that is, in *subjective reflection* since every objective reflection is impossible (6.2). The *how* of our attitudes (upon

¹⁷⁷ 'And out of love he becomes man!' (XII 128).

which we base our actions) becomes decisive. Taking both characteristics into account, we can formally say: we must relate to ourselves and others so that our belief in the God-man is involved. Now, to believe in the God-man by relating to ourselves and others in a certain way must be internally connected with the peculiar way in which the God-man expresses the how of his self-relation, in subjective reflection, that is, love. It would not make sense to believe in the God-man and, at the same time, express a certain how which is alien to the way in which the God-man himself showed the how. With this background we can understand that accepting Jesus as a teacher means to *imitate* him. Insofar as we imitate Jesus, the how of our self-relation is in truth. Such imitation or discipleship definitely does not consist in an imitation of any given fact of his life such as his chastity. It does not mean to imitate every relation that may have been characteristic of him. Rather it means an imitation and ever deeper involvement of *how* he related to other human beings and how he related to God, that is, how he indirectly exercised his love in subjective reflection.¹⁷⁸

In this short account of what it may mean to believe at the Christian stage of existence we have learned two crucial things. On the one hand, it is the God-man who loves us and thereby is the exemplar. Only under this condition are we capable of becoming Christian agents. In other words: we are dependent upon the God-man – if we want to have a good will. On the other hand, it has emerged that we are confronted with a *choice*: whether we *want* to believe in the God-man or not, that is, whether we want to be dependent upon him and to imitate him or not. These two aspects, the love of the God-man *and* our response to this love correspond to what Kierkegaard calls the ‘disclosure of our hearts’. It is the God-man who discloses *himself* and thereby ‘discloses the thoughts of hearts’ (XII 118). Yet part of such disclosure is our choice since ‘the thoughts of your heart are disclosed as you choose whether you will believe or not’ (XII 127). Such believing is the opposite of ordinary teaching as Kierkegaard claims (XII 118), but it is the way in which we are taught.

This leads to the problem of freedom at the Christian stage of existence. The determinations of the ethical and the religious stages stem

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *Practice in Christianity* XII 213–236. The God-relationship in many ways is the God-man-relationship. However, as far as I am aware, Kierkegaard never gave an explicit account of how his Christology should be related to the God-relationship, that is how exactly the God-man-relationship should be related to the God-relationship.

from freedom as the individual's choice to let one's will be determined by an unconditionally valid principle as one's *own* innermost possibility. At the Christian stage of existence this is not the case any longer, or it is the case in a very different way. The possibilities that one is attempting to realise do not stem from the individual's inwardness or from what she, in an autonomous way, conceives of as *her* law, but from the God-man himself. One is not supposed to live according to one's own command, but upon the God-man's command, that is, one basically has to conceive of oneself as a dependent and not self-sufficient agent, has to follow the God-man's example and to live accordingly. However, according to Kierkegaard, the God-man does not force us to do what he wants us to do. He rather gives us the choice of either choosing what he wants us to choose, or to live and act against his command, that is, to sin. Freedom at the stage of Christianity basically means freely to give up one's freedom as a self-determining agent. Of course, this dimension of Religiousness B is also alien to Kant's ethics on the whole.

As we have seen, the *ethical* individual conceives of her task as a possibility or principle which she can realise by her own power. The individual at the stage of Religiousness A is fully aware of the failure to fulfil the unconditional command to love as the universally human task which she finds inside herself. She is aware that she cannot realise this principle, but she recognises the corresponding 'ought' as a claim situated in her inwardness. As has become clear, Christianity involves giving up the attempt to realise an ethical/religious principle which has this origin. It involves that kind of possibility of our existence in which we conceive of it as not having solely originated in our very own self. It is first of all conceived of as stemming from God/the God-man himself and the principles/actions he commands and models. At the Christian stage of existence it is God/the God-man or the infinite itself which resembles the existential ideal which should determine our will. Jesus is the exemplar. By imitating him, by willing in the same ways as he did will, we base our lives upon *the* infinite as Kierkegaard sees it. Since limitless or unconditional principles or commanded actions do first of all not have their origin in the human being herself, but in God/the God-man, Kierkegaard again radically departs from Kant in respect of the Christian stage of existence. Moral worth lies solely in the will's principle according to Kant (G 400) and is not dependent upon the fact that the God/God-man comes to the world out of love, lives out of love and thereby leads an exemplary life. For Kierkegaard such an unconditional worth must primarily be ascribed

to God/the God-man and not to any human capacity. This idea is fully alien to Kant's ethics. Again and repeatedly: when Kant announces in the *Groundwork* that he wants to analyse the good will or what morality consists in, he implicitly claims that it is *our* good will which is the *only* unconditional good to which humans have access. Religiousness B breaks with this intuition. We do not have authentic attitudes solely by and through our own force, but only – ultimately – through the God/the God-man's love.¹⁷⁹ Only under the condition of the God-man's interference with the finite world are we capable of having a good will through an imitation of him. In other words: only under this condition are we capable of having an unconditionally good will, a view Kant would have never agreed with. What the good is like for Kant is independent of the descent of a God-man who exemplifies what the good consists in:

Nor could one give worse advice to morality than by wanting to derive it from examples. For, every example of it represented to me must itself first be appraised in accordance with principles of morality, as to whether it is also worthy to serve as an original example, that is, a model; it can by no means authoritatively provide the concept of morality. Even the Holy One of the Gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection ... (G 409).

6.2 The Impossibility of Objective Reflection

As we have seen in (5.4) religious existence is not an exemplification of Kantian reason. Kierkegaard's religious will does not receive its legitimacy by being capable of being derived from the categorical imperative, as with Kant's ethical will. As I discussed, a practical derivation always corresponds to a theoretical inference. Hence the cancellation of reason as a guideline does not necessarily involve the cancellation of its presupposition, the principle of contradiction. Though a religious will cannot be mediated, the impossibility of a theoretical inference does not involve a *logical* contradiction and hence there is some sense in which it remains speculative. Religiousness A need not, it seems, involve the annihilation of the *understanding's* uppermost principle. In the following final section I will show that from the viewpoint of objective reflection or from the viewpoint of *our* thinking¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ This can be most clearly seen in Kierkegaard's later writing *Works of Love*.

¹⁸⁰ As we saw in Chapter 1, God, according to Kierkegaard, does not think but creates. Therefore, it seems to be Kierkegaard's position that for *God's* thinking the object of faith is not logically contradictory, but I cannot expand on this issue here. Poul Lübcke

the object of faith, the God-man, is indeed fully inconceivable since our understanding *does* thereby discover a logical contradiction. I will argue this is the Kierkegaardian position.¹⁸¹

For Kierkegaard, 'all logical thinking is in the language of abstraction' (VII 264 / *SKS* 7,280). The language of abstraction clearly corresponds to what he calls 'abstract thinking' (VII 258 / *SKS* 7, 277). Insofar as we use language or make judgements *some* kind of abstract and thereby logical thinking is inevitable since concepts are always general and emerge from abstraction according to Kierkegaard. Nothing that can be thought can possibly contradict the principle of contradiction. *Every* kind of thinking must hence involve some kind of logical thinking, that is, must be in accordance with formal logic.¹⁸²

As we have seen repeatedly, insofar as we reflect objectively, '*the emphasis is on what is said*' (VII 169 / *SKS* 185). We are dealing with determinations of what is or with determinations of thinking. Thinking is always thinking of something, a 'what' as Kierkegaard puts it. This is the case even if there is nothing that corresponds to it in reality.¹⁸³ As soon as we try to think without the principle of contradiction, we do not think 'something' since the corresponding statement contradicts its very own content. In other words: we do not make *any* sense. If we reflect objectively, that is, investigate truth theoretically or as an object, we cannot do so by making an assertion that contradicts itself logically. This is the necessary condition of any kind of object or any kind of 'what'.

Against this background, I would like to have a look at the meaning of the crucial passage in respect of the nature of objective and subjective reflection to which I have repeatedly referred, especially in connection with the ethical and the religious stages. Let us focus on any objective reflection (except objective thinking as mathematical knowledge) which involves the necessity of respecting the principle of contradiction. If we respect this condition, then reflecting on the object involves thinking

has some highly illuminating thoughts on it. Compare his excellent essay 'Indirect Communication and Kierkegaard's Transcendental Perspectivism' in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, ed. by Poul Houe and Gordon Marino, Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel Forlag 2003, pp. 28–38.

¹⁸¹ Many interpreters make Kierkegaard less radical than he really is in this respect. However, in the following I will develop this claim as it can be derived from the *Postscript*. As far as I am aware, no such deduction has previously been attempted.

¹⁸² I do not mean to identify thinking as such with logical thinking as belonging to a logical system. However, I believe that thinking must involve doing justice to the principle of contradiction and in this weak sense must always be logical to some extent.

¹⁸³ In Kantian terminology this is tantamount to an invention of objects.

that does not contradict itself logically. We then relate to the ‘what’ as the true or as the possibly true.¹⁸⁴ If we do not respect this condition, then we relate to untruth (since what we think is not logically valid) and this cannot possibly be an object or a ‘something’ any more.

For Kierkegaard, subjective truth is possible despite the fact that we may relate to untruth with regard to objective reflection. With respect to every necessary aspect of objective reflection, ‘untruth’ would be tantamount to our not being in accordance with the principle of contradiction. Let us try to visualise this case more concretely: Subjective reflection implies a will, which attempts to realise what should be. If the individual relates to herself (and others) in a true way, a way that is in agreement with her ideal self, then she is in truth. According to the passage in respect of subjective and objective reflection we can see that even if objective reflection discovers a logical contradiction, an ‘untruth’, the self may still be in truth subjectively. In other words, by trying to relate to truth objectively, we necessarily fail, but this does not affect the subjective truth, that is, does not prevent our will from exemplifying a certain how. In sum, the fact that we do not respect the principle of contradiction may not be a hindrance altogether to our being in truth subjectively, according to Kierkegaard. That the self is in truth subjectively may not be annihilated by the fact that an objective reflection upon the object of faith involves dropping the understanding’s uppermost principle, the principle of contradiction.

Let us summarise the argument thus far: If we try to reflect objectively about Christian subjectivity, that is, in terms of the determinations of thinking which involve formal logic, we shall arrive at a contradiction or a paradox. What we (try to) relate to does not make sense any more. We cannot reflect upon the basis of Christian subjectivity in an objective way at all, because whatever we can reflect upon must necessarily be in agreement with the principle of contradiction. A theoretical derivation of Christian willing is impossible if its basis of justification contains a logical contradiction. As we have seen above, objective reflection deals with objects. If we reflect objectively in terms of formal logic, then everything can count as an object if only it does not logically contradict itself. What if the basis of Christian belief really does involve a logical impossibility? As we have seen in (6.1), the object of faith at the Christian stage is the God-man. What if *the* object of

¹⁸⁴ Remember that truth here does not need to correspond to a real object, but only to an invented one, that is, a thought-object. Of course, not everything that is logically valid is also true, but it is a necessary condition of all truth.

Christian faith cannot possibly be an object insofar we reflect or think objectively, because our thinking discovers a logical contradiction? What if the God-man is the finite and at the same time and in the same respect is the infinite?

So far I have argued that the Christian stage of existence *may* involve an untruth (namely a logically invalid proposition) in the sense of a straightforward logical contradiction. However, as we will see, Kierkegaard repeatedly emphasises that the Christian stage of existence involves giving up *any* kind of possibility of reflecting objectively upon the object of faith. Furthermore he will also claim that the Christian stage is not only 'simply' paradoxical (as is the religious stage), but is concerned with the paradox *in itself*. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the understanding clearly involves, according to Kierkegaard, the successful application of the principle of contradiction. Now if *all* understanding or objective reflection fails and if the understanding's uppermost principle is indeed the principle of contradiction – does it not follow naturally that the conception of the Christian stage *does* involve a *formal* contradiction? If this was not the case, then the whole of Kierkegaard's analysis in the *Postscript* would not be fully consistent. In other words: giving up *all* possibilities of understanding Christian subjectivity naturally hints at the fact that this finally means dismissing the understanding's uppermost condition. Therefore I feel justified in stating that the burden of proof lies on those interpreters who claim that the principle of contradiction is *not* given up by Kierkegaard with respect to the Christian object of thought.¹⁸⁵

However, it is a further claim that subjective truth at the Christian stage of existence *must* contain a logical contradiction if reflected upon objectively. In the following I will try to find more evidence for this claim. In the *Postscript* Kierkegaard starts to focus on the Chris-

¹⁸⁵ In this connection I would like to mention two interpreters of Kierkegaard, namely Steven Evans and Merold Westphal. Both try to show that the Christian stage does not involve a logical contradiction and thereby represent the viewpoint of a number of other interpreters in a marked way. In what follows, I will refer primarily to Westphal's discussion in his otherwise well-argued book *Becoming a Self*; for Evans, see his *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press Inc. 1983, esp. pp. 210–249. From my viewpoint, the background of these kinds of interpreters must be located in their intention to defend Kierkegaard against charges of irrationalism. To the question whether Kierkegaard is finally an irrationalist *because* he may give up the principle of contradiction, I do not have a final answer. However, I am convinced that the kind of rationalisation of faith these interpreters attribute to Kierkegaard is inadequate.

tian stage of existence when he introduces sin: ‘So, then, subjectivity, inwardness, is truth. Is there a more inward expression for it? Yes, if the discussion about “Subjectivity, inwardness, is truth” begins in this way: “Subjectivity is untruth”’ (VII 174 / *SKS* 7, 189). A few sentences later he asserts: ‘Let us now call the individual’s untruth *sin*’ (VII 174 / *SKS* 7, 191). What does this mean with respect to the nature of subjective reflection as discussed in the passage from which this discussion stems? Let us just insert sin as untruth into it. The first part of the decisive sentence then reads: ‘If only the how of this relation is in untruth or in sin, the individual is in truth ...’. In other words: it is a more inward expression of our existence to realise that we sin than to be unaware of it. We are ‘in truth’ to a higher degree if we understand that we are in rebelliousness against what the Christian God commands and, of course, we are even more in truth if we – with the help of this God – fulfil the command (to love). But what about the crucial last part of this sentence – ‘... even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth’? What kind of untruth does the individual relate herself to when she reflects objectively? What is the meaning of the paradox at this stage of existence from the objective viewpoint?

At the stage of Religiousness A, one can claim: ‘Subjectivity is truth. The paradox came into existence by relating [*at forholde sig*] to the eternal, essential truth to [*til*] the existing person’ (VII 175 / *SKS* 191). After these two sentences Kierkegaard immediately begins to characterise Religiousness B:

Let us now go *further*; let us assume that the eternal, essential truth *is itself* the paradox. How does the paradox emerge? By placing the eternal, essential truth together with existing. Consequently, if we place [*sætte*] it together *in* the truth *itself*, the truth becomes a paradox. The eternal truth has come into existence in time. That is the paradox (VII 175 / *SKS* 7, 191, italics mine).

At the stage of Religiousness A, we, in time, enter into a connection with the eternal (as an unconditional and passionate will to love). Insofar as such a connection emerges through our objective reflection, it becomes paradoxical (as we have seen extensively in 5.4). Now it is obvious from the above quote that the paradox at the stage of Religiousness B *also* comes to the fore through a connection of the eternal with an individual, that is, if ‘we place’ the eternal with existing. Therefore, some kind of connection applies to both Religiousness A and Religiousness B.¹⁸⁶ Since the latter quote is obviously supposed to

¹⁸⁶ The assertion that the eternal, essential truth is related to existing in respect of Religiousness A does not entail a *logical* contradiction. Insofar as we base our attitude

be characteristic of Religiousness B and not A, we must understand *the exact* meaning of the sentences with respect to the status of the connection between the eternal and existing from which the paradox emerges.¹⁸⁷

Kierkegaard claims that in B the essential truth is *itself* the paradox as opposed to A in which our relation to an essential truth becomes (simply) paradoxical. However, it is not simply *our* finite relation to something paradoxical on which Kierkegaard *focuses* in the latter quote. Rather, the eternal essential truth is itself the paradox, because it is *placed* with existing. Whereas at the stage of Religiousness A the paradox comes into existence by being *related* [*at forholde sig*] to the existing person, at the stage of Religiousness B it shows itself by being *placed* [*sat*] in existence. Obviously we must distinguish the sense in which we *relate* existence to the eternal truth and in which the eternal truth itself is *placed* in existence.

How is the eternal essential truth itself *placed* together with finite existence? They are placed together *in* the truth itself. In other words: the eternal truth itself is placed *as* someone/something who/that is existing. It is the very same respect in which the eternal essential truth is concerned and in which (non-eternal or finite) existing is concerned. Therefore, the eternal *is* the non-eternal. This is a logical paradox. It is from the standpoint of this kind of paradox that we have to understand Kierkegaard's claim that the eternal essential truth has come into existence in time. As opposed to Religiousness A in which we *re-late* our existence *to* the eternal, in Religiousness B existence (the non-eternal) is *placed together* with the eternal in such a way that existence is placed *as* the eternal.¹⁸⁸ This placing together, of course, corresponds to the object of faith for a Christian, that is, Jesus as the son of God in whom the logical paradox is *realised* and *embodied*.

(in time) upon an unconditional law (not being in time), it may be the categorical imperative or the law to love passionately. It 'only' presupposes a peculiar kind of causality being different from the causality of nature (and hence a dualistic conception). To speak with Kant (and with respect to the issue itself in Kierkegaard) it is *freedom* which is a property of such causality (cf. G 446).

¹⁸⁷ With respect to the Socratic position by means of which Kierkegaard sometimes illustrates Religiousness A, Merold Westphal *Becoming a Self*, p. 125, claims: 'Here the contradiction is already in the Socratic position, and it does not concern the logical form of the proposition ...'. This is, of course, true. However, Westphal thereby wants to give evidence for the fact that since B is obviously paradoxical as well, it *therefore* does not involve a *logical* contradiction. We can immediately see that this inference is not necessarily valid.

In Religiousness A the persistence of guilt denotes that we are not realising the eternal command inside our selves. In Religiousness B the eternal truth ‘has come in front of him’ (VII 175 / *SKS* 7, 192) as a logical paradox: someone who *is* not God *is* God. The eternal and non-eternal are not simply two different attributes that can coexist side by side. God is not in one sense infinite and in another sense finite. Rather he is finite *in* his infinity and infinite *in* his finiteness. In other words he is finite and infinite at the same time and in the same respect. As the finite he *is* the infinite or he as the infinite *is* the finite. This logical paradox denotes what Kierkegaard calls *the absurd*: ‘When the paradox itself is the paradox, it thrusts away by virtue of the absurd ...’ (VII 176 / *SKS* 7, 192). Kierkegaard has *Jesus* as the God-man in mind: ‘What, then, is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, etc. has come into existence exactly as an individual human being, indistinguishable from any other human being ...’ (VII 176 / *SKS* 7, 193). ‘So it is with the God-man. Immediately he is an individual human being, just like others, a lowly, unimpressive human being, but now comes the contradiction – that *he* is God’ (XIII 118). We are now in a position to answer the question about the kind of untruth to which the individual relates herself when she reflects objectively upon the foundation of Christian willing. The untruth consists in a logical contradiction that there has been someone who was God and man at the same time and in the same respect: Jesus of Nazareth as Christ. At this point Christianity breaks completely with the understanding. It is ‘absolutely paradoxical’ (VII 175 / *SKS* 7, 191) and ‘runs directly counter to all thinking’ (VII 497 / *SKS* 7, 518), ‘in direct opposition to all human understanding’ (VII 211), because it does not respect the principle of contradic-

¹⁸⁸ Kierkegaard expresses this repeatedly with respect to Religiousness B: ‘The paradox emerges when the eternal truth and existing are *placed* together ...’ (VII 174 / *SKS* 7, 191, italics mine). As far as I can see, Kierkegaard is very precise and uses the same kinds of words when he expresses the difference between A and B. In order to give some further confirmation, let me cite a corresponding later passage: ‘When the eternal truth relates itself to an existing person, it becomes the paradox. Through the objective uncertainty and ignorance, the paradox thrusts away in the inwardness of the existing person. But since the paradox is not *in itself* the paradox, it does not thrust away intensely enough, for without risk, no faith; the more risk, the more faith; the more objective reliability, the less inwardness (since inwardness is subjectivity); the less objective reliability, the less inwardness, the deeper is the possible inwardness’ (VII 176 / *SKS* 7, 192, my emphasis).

tion. Insofar as we objectively relate to Jesus as Christ, that is, in terms of categories of thinking we must necessarily fail to understand. We cannot *possibly* understand, because the principle of contradiction is the condition of all objective truth for Kierkegaard. Expressed differently, the truth is a paradox, contradicts itself and hence is an untruth. To come back to the crucial discussion about the nature of objective and subjective reflection with which the whole of this analysis started, we can finally say: to relate objectively to untruth and hence to discover a logical paradox at the Christian stage is a necessary condition of relating to the God-man. This is the eternal essential truth. However, it is an untruth, because it has the status of a logical paradox. *The* truth is an untruth for us and may even be from the objective viewpoint of Jesus himself.

The God-man is 'a definite something' (VII 485 / *SKS* 7, 506) that cannot be a something, because as logically contradictory it annihilates the very possibility of being what it is. It is a content that cannot be a content for thinking, because whatever can be thought must not contradict itself. Accordingly, human understanding can 'draw the distinction qualitatively between what he understands and what he does not understand ..., can discover that there is something that is, despite its being against his understanding and thinking' (VII 487 / *SKS* 7, 507). It is this uppermost theoretical insight that consists in understanding that we cannot understand and the human being must remain content with this. Let us recall that according to both Kant and Kierkegaard acting *ethically* consists in doing the good for its own sake, that is, unconditionally. Hence we cannot ground such an attitude on any other kind of ('pathological') interest or condition. For Kant as for Kierkegaard this means that we understand theoretically that we cannot explain or understand morality. Furthermore, both agree that we can – and must – be capable of reflecting it objectively in terms of a syllogistic inference or what Kierkegaard (partly and implicitly) refers to as mediation. As we have seen in (5.4), we cannot practically derive from the categorical imperative how the religious will should be put into action. Correspondingly, a mediation becomes impossible at the *religious* stage since this stage rests on a different kind of universality. We understand that we cannot understand, not only because a religious will must be an unconditional will as well (though of a different status than the ethical will), but we also understand that we cannot mediate it theoretically in terms of reasoning toward inferences. The assertion denoting our maxim stands in contradiction with the assertion denoting the categorical imperative. From a practical viewpoint, the will stands in contra-

diction with the command of the categorical imperative. The *Christian* stage involves a final radicalisation in respect of the understanding since we understand that we cannot possibly understand the God-man, because it involves a straightforward logical contradiction. The Christian stage not only breaks with the necessity that a will be reasonable and hence have its basis in the universality of the categorical imperative, but it also further bases the will upon an object that cannot be thought because it entails a logical contradiction.

Both Kant and Kierkegaard agree that a logical contradiction cannot be thought. Also Kant would certainly agree that we can understand that we cannot understand it. In this narrow respect, Kierkegaard is closer to Kant than to Hegel. From the viewpoint of Kierkegaard¹⁸⁹ it is part of Hegel's project – as opposed to Kant's – to abstract from the principle of contradiction and to annul it in the dialectical movements of pure thinking (cf. VII 261 / *SKS* 7, 277). Against this background, we can understand that, according to Kierkegaard, the annulment of the principle of contradiction indicates the deceptive character of Hegelian thinking: 'To think existence *sub specie aeterni* and in abstraction is essentially to annul it, and the merit of it resembles the much heralded merit of cancelling the principle of contradiction' (VII 264 / *SKS* 7, 281). And we can also understand that Kierkegaard must disapprove of the Hegelian claim concerning such annulment since its corresponding *a priori* mediation prevents human existence from recognising the logical paradox as a paradox. It prevents humans from 'understanding' that they cannot understand and that they have to dedicate their existence on the whole to believing in the God-man, which in the strictest sense is objectively impossible: '[T]he only possible understanding of the absolute paradox is that it cannot be understood. But then speculative thought cannot ever grasp it'. Entirely correct, this just what is said by the paradox, which thrusts away only in the direction of inwardness in existence' (VII 183 / *SKS* 7, 199).

We have already analysed the issues discussed in this passage. Let me now instead very briefly relate Kierkegaard's Christian conception to Kant. As has been argued it is a 'specific' logical contradiction which is involved at the Christian stage of existence. Here *all* objective reflection about the God-man, *all* determinations of thinking about the corresponding eternal necessarily fail; here, we are unable to arrive at any theoretical result whatsoever. We have to believe in

¹⁸⁹ I leave it open whether the Kierkegaardian point of view does *justice* to Hegel's thinking in this respect.

the God-man in spite of and against the understanding. Nowhere in Kant's writings does a logical contradiction have a place. If we contradict ourselves logically or if we cannot represent practical knowledge theoretically at all, then all possibility of truth vanishes. It does not make sense to consider such truth practically. Even the dialectical illusions which Kant discusses in the *Transcendental Dialectic* are not self-contradictory in the sense that they are *logically* incoherent. On the contrary, they are *necessary* illusions, because from a logical point of view they are in order. However, for Kierkegaard it is essential to Christianity to believe that which the understanding cannot possibly digest. In this respect Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity *radically* departs from Kantian thought on the whole.¹⁹⁰ To believe in this kind of truth of the God-man is miles away from what could have possibly made sense to Kant. Kant's religious thinking basically involves the reinterpretation of Christian belief in terms of his ethics, that is, in terms of the existential ideal of practical *reason*. Kierkegaard, on the contrary, most importantly eliminates reason and understanding from belief.

¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless in a *broad* sense they both agree that it is a critical task of thinking that we draw the boundary between what we can and cannot understand.

Conclusion

Throughout this book I have placed emphasis on the rational capacities of the human being in respect of Kant's and Kierkegaard's conception of theory and practice. In the process, I have tried to make use of what I called a systematic approach to Kant and Kierkegaard (see the introduction). In Chapter 1 we discerned some basic agreements between Kant and Kierkegaard in the search for an epistemology. It became apparent that the understanding in its *logical* function is crucial for both Kant and Kierkegaard. However, in Chapter 2 we saw that Kierkegaard rejects the claim that the understanding has a legitimate *transcendental* function. For Kant, the understanding is an *a priori* condition of empirical knowledge and only if these demands of the understanding are satisfied, does knowledge become true. For Kierkegaard empirical knowledge cannot have that kind of status relative to the understanding. In Chapter 3 it turned out that, according to both Kant and Kierkegaard, a determination of the will based upon counsels of prudence is a kind of rationality incapable of realising what it means to be a moral or religious agent. To act in accordance with the principles of such knowledge has only hypothetical status. In Chapter 4 we became acquainted with the determination of the will in terms of the categorical imperative which is crucial in the conception of the ethical according to Kant and which stands in no contradiction with what Kierkegaard says. The categorical imperative is an abstract unconditional law which represents reason as independent of the principles of (knowledge of) nature. Accordingly, it is valid in itself and is hence capable of giving a definite practical orientation to us. As theoretical reason, the categorical imperative is capable of being represented theoretically in terms of an inference/mediation from it to the individual will. However, as we saw, the ethical stage fails because of guilt. Therefore Kierkegaard moves to the religious, the next expression of a definite orientation being valid in itself. This stage, which we examined in Chapter 5, involves an annihilation of reason and can be understood as an unconditional law to love in a passionate way. The annihilation of reason showed itself in the impossibility of representing it as a theoret-

ical inference, that is, as the impossibility of being mediated. Correspondingly, the religious will is paradoxical. It stands in contradiction to the universal law of reason, but it does not involve a logical contradiction. Nevertheless, even the religious stage fails – again because of the impossibility of living up to it, that is, because of guilt. Finally, in Chapter 6, we turned to the Christian stage of existence. The Christian stage gives up the last shelter of rationality, that is, the uppermost principle of the understanding: the principle of contradiction. To be a Christian basically involves believing in the God-man and acting according to his model. However, we cannot understand this any more at all, it is fully paradoxical since whatever is capable of being understood cannot be self-contradictory. Nevertheless Kierkegaard conceives of the God-man as the truth itself and only if we base our lives upon him, can we be in the truth itself, that is, have a unified and actual self. Against this background, let us finally recall a quote from the *Postscript*: ‘The only *an sich* that cannot be thought is existing’ (VII 283 / SKS 7, 300). At the Christian stage this claim comes to its proper and final end. The God-man is fully *incapable* of being grasped by means of any rational capacity. To believe in him and, accordingly, to exist cannot be thought at all. He is the truth itself and, according to Kierkegaard, insofar as we succeed in imitating him, our selves also may become ‘true’ in themselves. Kierkegaard does not pretend that faith is rational. He does not pretend that being a Christian makes logical sense.

One often finds in the secondary literature a tendency to defend Kierkegaard against charges of irrationalism. Those interpreters who want to defend him in this way argue that the paradox involved at the Christian stage of existence is not a logical paradox *sensu strictu*. However, no matter how much we may want to defend a favoured thinker against critics we have to face the harsh reality of the text. As I have tried to show, the reality of the text does not allow us to draw the conclusion that the object of faith is *not* logically self-contradictory. It does not allow us to draw the conclusion that it is possible to conceive of the basis of Christian faith theoretically. It follows that the attempt to attribute a rational understanding of faith to Kierkegaard is illegitimate. To speak in Kierkegaardian terms: such an attempt is seeking to reflect objectively upon the object of faith, but does not acknowledge that for Kierkegaard the object of faith can only be grasped subjectively, that is, in the way we live or in the way we relate to other human beings and God. It wants to understand the object of faith as the fundamental dimension of Christian existence and does not remain with Kierkegaard who stresses that we can only understand that we cannot.

If we take Kant as being representative of *philosophy*, then the Kierkegaardian position finally is a non-philosophical position. Is it then in some sense representative of *theology* and therefore of a final breach between theology and philosophy? If we conceive of the principle of contradiction as essential to philosophy (and not to theology) such a view is justified. But if we do not – how can we distinguish between philosophy and theology at all? Or should theology itself disown Kierkegaard and his kind of irrationalism in order to be capable of continuing a dialogue with philosophy in the tradition of Kant? The failure of the understanding to make sense of the object of faith may perhaps also suggest that the interpretation of Søren Kierkegaard finally requires the supplement of e. g. a literary or a rhetorical analysis in order to see if there is nevertheless some kind of theoretical sense to be made of his final non-sensical position. This, however, though it may be legitimate on its own terms, leaves behind *Kierkegaard's* insistence that we cannot understand but that we have to live in the imitation of Christ.

Despite the fact that the object of faith involves a logical contradiction it has been the primary aim of this book to show that Kierkegaard is a thinker who should be taken more seriously as a thinker in the strict sense, that his thinking is more coherent and systematic than most interpreters have realised or wanted to realise. Kierkegaard uses reason (and experience) to conclude that the object of faith is the fundamental dimension of Christian faith, although that object itself can't be grasped by reason and understanding. Furthermore, even when our rationality fails to make sense of the object of faith, we can understand that we cannot understand and such an 'understanding' does not lack a systematic place as was already stated in the introduction. One outcome of this study, then, is that it offers an example of a methodological approach which Kierkegaard researchers may want to draw upon in their future work. Indeed it is my conviction that future commentators should take the Dane's seriousness at face value. It is my conviction that such investigation has to come *before* any other kind of investigation. Simply to take for granted or to 'feel' that Kierkegaard's works lack a systematic and argumentative structure and then to start with some kind of analysis in which 'anything goes' does justice neither to Kierkegaard's intellectual nor his religious seriousness. Instead of taking for granted that Kierkegaard's works transcend a systematic order and lack an argumentative structure, interpreters should face the task of laying themselves open to this seriousness of the Dane.

Bibliography

Works by Kant and Kierkegaard

Kant

- Reflexionen Kants zur kritischen Philosophie*, ed. by Benno Erdmann, Leipzig: Feuss Verlag 1882.
- Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik I*, ed. by Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1977.
- Critique of Judgment*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1987.
- Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by, Norman Kemp Smith, 2ed., London: Macmillan Press 1993.
- Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. by Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998.
- Critique of Practical Reason in Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999.
- Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals in Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999.
- The Metaphysics of Morals in Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999.

Kierkegaard

- Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, 14 Volumes, ed. by A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg, and H. O. Lange, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1901–06.
- Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, 2nd edition, 16 Volumes, ed. by Niels Thulstrup and Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1968–78.
- Kierkegaard's Writings*, 26 Volumes, ed. and trans. by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong et al, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978–2000.

Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter, 55 Volumes, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappeleørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, Alastair McKinnon, Jette Knudsen and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, Copenhagen: Gads Forlag 1997-.

Other Works

Allison, Henry E. *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990.

– *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, New Haven / London: Yale University Press 1983.

Bäumler, Alfred 'Kierkegaard und Kant über die Reinheit des Herzens' in *Zwischen den Zeiten* 3 (1925), pp. 31–47.

Brunner, Emil 'Das Grundproblem der Philosophie bei Kant und Kierkegaard' in *Zwischen den Zeiten* 3 (1924), pp. 31–47.

Connell, George *To Be One Thing: Personal Unity in Kierkegaard's Thought*, Macon: Mercer University Press 1985.

Cruysberghs, Paul 'Beyond world history: 'On Hegel's and Kierkegaard's interests in ethics and religion' in *History of European Ideas* 20 (1995), pp. 155–160.

Deuser, Hermann *Kierkegaard: Die Philosophie des religiösen Schriftstellers*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1985.

Diem, Hermann *Die Existenzdialektik von Søren Kierkegaard*, Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag 1950.

Dreyfus, Hubert L. *Being-in-the-World*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1992.

Evans, C. Steven *Subjectivity and Religious Belief: A Historical, Critical Study*, Grand Rapids: Christian University Press 1978.

– *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press Inc. 1983.

Fahrenbach, Helmut 'Kierkegaards ethische Existenzanalyse (als "Korrektiv" der Kantisch-idealistischen Moralphilosophie)' in *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, ed. Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1979, pp. 216–238.

– *Kierkegaards existenzdialektische Ethik*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1968.

Ferreira, Jamie 'Making Room for Faith – Possibility and Hope' in *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion*, ed. by D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin, London: MacMillan Press 2000, pp. 73–88.

- *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991.
- Friedmann, R. Z. 'Kierkegaard: First Existentialist or Last Kantian?' in *Religious Studies* 18:2 (1982), pp. 159–170.
- Geuss, Raymond *Privatheit Eine Genealogie*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2002.
- Gouwens, David J. *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of the Imagination*, New York: Peter Lang 1989.
- Green, Ronald M. *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1992.
- Greve, Wilfried *Kierkegaards maieutische Ethik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1990.
- Grøn, Arne 'Temporality in Kierkegaard's Edifying Discourses' in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 2000*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 2000, pp. 191–204.
- Guyer, Paul *Kant and the claims of knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987.
- Hannay, Alastair *Kierkegaard*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd 1982.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1986.
- *Wissenschaft der Logik I & II*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1993.
- Heidegger, Martin *Phänomenologische Interpretation von Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1977.
- *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1991.
- Henrich, Dieter *Identität und Objektivität*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitäts-Verlag 1976.
- Horstmann, Rolf-Peter *Wahrheit aus dem Begriff*, Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain 1990.
- *Grenzen der Vernunft*, 2nd ed., Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum Verlag 1995.
- Knappe, Ulrich 'Der Kantianismus Kierkegaard's in der Konzeption der Einheit praktischer Subjektivität' in *Kant und die Berliner Aufklärung*, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 2001.
- 'Kant's and Kierkegaard's conception of ethics' in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2002*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 2002.

- ‘Kant and Kierkegaard on the Failure of the Unity of the Self’ in *Kierkegaardiana* 22, Copenhagen: 2002.
- ‘The Notion of Paradox in Postscript and Fragments’ (forthcoming).
- ‘Kierkegaard’s epistemology’ in *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*, (forthcoming).
- Lübcke, Poul ‘Indirect Communication and Kierkegaard’s Transcendental Perspectivism’ in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, ed. by Poul Houe and Gordon Marino, Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel Forlag 2003, pp. 28–38.
- ‘Kierkegaards Zeitverständnis in seinem Verhältnis zu Hegel’ in *Text & Kontext* 7 (1980), pp. 84–111.
- ‘Selvets ontologi hos Kierkegaard’ in *Kierkegaardiana* 13 (1984), pp. 50–62.
- ‘An analytical interpretation of Kierkegaard as moral philosopher’ in *Kierkegaardiana* 15 (1991), pp. 93–103.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair *After Virtue*, London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd 1999.
- Malantschuk, Gregor *Kierkegaard’s Thought*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1971.
- Muench, Paul ‘The Socratic Method of Kierkegaard’s Pseudonym Johannes Climacus’ in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, ed. by Poul Houe and Gordon Marino, Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel Forlag 2003, pp. 139–150.
- Nordentoft, Kresten *Kierkegaard’s Psychology*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1978.
- Paton, H. J. *Kant’s Metaphysics of Experience*, 2 vols., New York: Macmillan 1936.
- *The Categorical Imperative*, London: Hutchinson Co. 1958.
- Pattison, George *The Aesthetic and the Religious*, Basingstoke: Macmillan 1992.
- ‘Kierkegaard and the Sublime’ in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1998*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 2000, pp. 245–275.
- Peck, William Dayton *On Autonomy: The Primacy of the Subject in Kant and Kierkegaard*, Ph. D. Diss., Yale University, Connecticut 1974.
- Prauss, Gerold ‘Zum Wahrheitsproblem bei Kant’ in *Kant: Zur Deutung seiner Theorie von Erkennen und Handeln*, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch 1973, pp. 72–88.
- Reich, Klaus *Die Vollständigkeit der kantischen Urteilstafel*, Berlin: Diss., Rostock 1932.

- Ricoeur, Paul 'Philosophieren nach Kierkegaard' in *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, ed. by Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1979, pp. 579–596.
- Roberts, Robert C. 'Some Remarks on the Concept of Passion' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon: Mercer University Press 1984, pp. 87–106.
- Rasmussen, Anders Moe 'The Legacy of Jacobi in Schelling and Kierkegaard' in *Kierkegaard und Schelling*, ed. by Jochem Hennigfeld and John Stewart: *Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series* 8, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 2003.
- Rosenau, Hartmut 'Die Erzählung von Abrahams Opfer (Gen 22) und ihre Deutung bei Kant, Kierkegaard und Schelling' in *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 27 (1985), pp. 251–261.
- Rudd, Anthony *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993.
- 'Kierkegaard and the Sceptics' in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6 (1998), pp. 71–88.
- Schäfer, Klaus *Hermeneutische Ontologie*, München: Kösel-Verlag 1968.
- Schmidinger, Heinrich M. *Das Problem des Interesses und die Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, München: Alber 1983.
- Schönecker, Dieter/Wood, Allen W. *Kant's Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Schöningh 2002.
- Sløk, Johannes *Die Anthropologie Kierkegaards*, Copenhagen: Rosenkilde und Bagger 1954.
- Söderquist, K. Brian *The Closed Self. Nihilism and Hubris in Kierkegaard's The Concept of Irony*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Copenhagen 2004.
- 'The Religious Suspension of the Ethical and the Ironic Suspension of the Ethical: The Problem of Actuality in *Fear and Trembling*' in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 2002*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappeleørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 2002.
- Stack, George *Kierkegaard's Existential Ethics*, Alabama: Alabama University Press 1977.
- Theunissen, Michael *Der Begriff Ernst bei Søren Kierkegaard*, Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber 1958.
- 'Kierkegaard's Werk und Wirkung' in *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards*, ed. by Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1979, pp. 11–104.

- *Negative Theologie der Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1991.
- *Das Selbst auf dem Grunde der Verzweiflung*, Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain 1991.
- *Der Begriff Verzweiflung*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1993.
- Thulstrup, Niels *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. by George L. Stengren, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980.
- Tugendhat, Ernst *Vorlesungen über Ethik*, 3rd ed., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1995.
- Walker, Jeremy D. B. *To Will One Thing*, Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press 1972.
- Verstrynge, Karl 'The Perfection of the Kierkegaardian Self in Regulative Perspective' in *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 2004*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 2004.
- Walsh, W. H. *Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1975.
- Westphal, Merold *Becoming a Self*, West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press 1996.
- Wolff, Michael *Die Vollständigkeit der kantischen Urteilstafel*, Frankfurt am Main: Walter de Gruyter 1995.
- Wood, Allen W. *Kant's Ethical Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999.

Index

- Abraham 80–83
Allison, Henry E. 21, 31, 55, 87
Anselm, Sigrun viii
Aristotle 79

Bittner, Rüdiger viii
Brunner, Emil 3

Cappelørn, Niels Jørgen vii
Connell, George 3, 57
Cruysberghs, Paul vii, 3

Deuser, Hermann viii, 93
Diem, Hermann 3

Evans, C. Steven 3, 112, 138

Fahrenbach, Helmut 3
Ferreira, Jamie 3, 123
Fichte, Johann Gottlieb 6, 43, 50
Friedmann, R. Z. 3

Geuss, Raymond vii
Gouwens, David J. 3
Green, Ronald M. 4–6, 17, 33, 99
Greve, Wilfred 7, 51, 80
Grøn, Arne 33

Hamann, Johann Georg 21
Hannay, Alastair vii, 3, 47, 93, 103, 104, 123
Hegel, G. W. F. 6, 20, 24, 39, 43, 49–51, 78–81, 85, 123, 143
Heidegger, Martin 45
Henrich, Dieter 5
Horstmann, Rolf-Peter vii, 43, 50

Judge William 13, 79, 80, 84, 94, 122

Klercke, Kirsten vii

Lübcke, Poul vii, 135, 136
Lund, Cynthia vii

MacIntyre 96
Malantschuk, Gregor 3
Marino, Gordon vii
Muench, Paul vii

Nordentoft, Kresten 17
Nymann Eriksen, Niels vii

Pattison, George vii
Peck, William Dayton 52
Phillips, D. Z. 3, 101, 123
Plato 79
Prauss, Gerold 26

Rasmussen, Anders Moe vii
Reich, Klaus 23
Ricoeur, Paul 3, 51
Roberts, Robert C. 123

Schelling, F. W. J. 6, 43, 50
Schmidinger, Heinrich M. 116
Schopenhauer, Arthur 123
Schönecker, Dieter 76, 87, 88, 90
Schwarz Wentzer, Thomas vii
Sløk, Johannes 3, 118
Socrates 79, 125
Söderquist, Brian vii, 95, 125

Tessin, Timothy 3, 123
Thaning, Christine vii
Theunissen, Michael viii, 3, 7, 8, 51, 117
Thulstrup, Niels 3
Tolstrup, Christian vii
Tugendhat, Ernst 107, 115

Verstrynge, Karl vii, 110

Walker, Jeremy 3, 106
Westphal, Merold 33, 138, 140
Wolff, Michael 22, 23
Wood, Allen W. 72, 76, 87, 88, 90